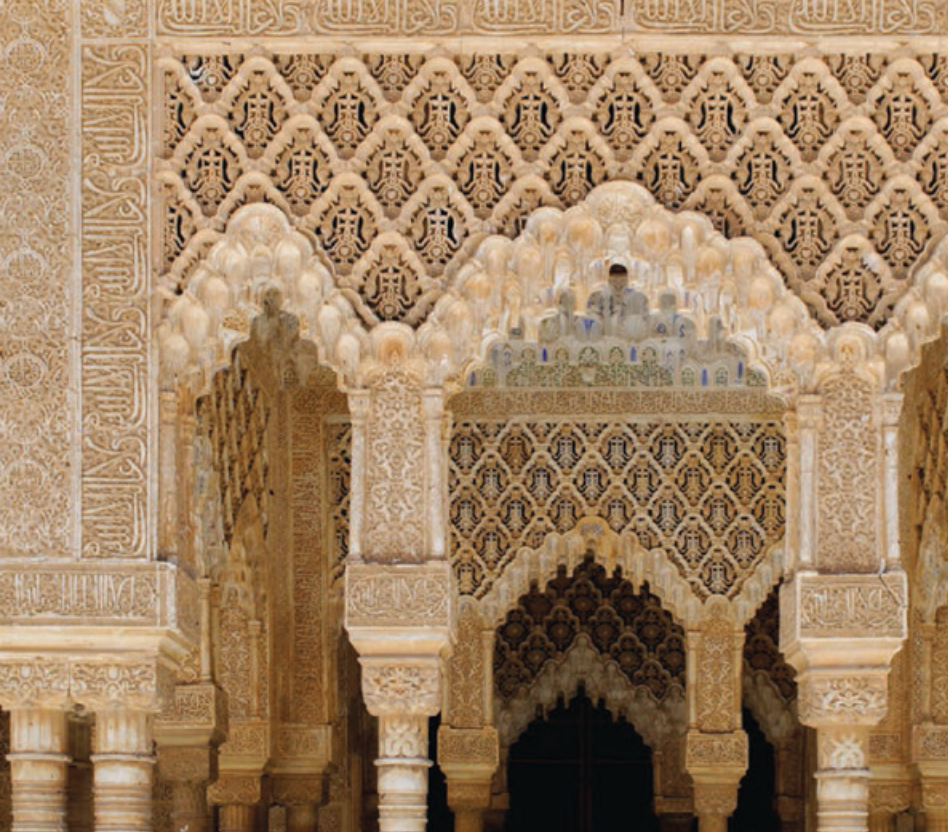




THE MEDIEVAL GLOBE
EXECUTIVE EDITOR CAROL SYMES

MEDIEVAL SICILY, AL-ANDALUS, AND THE MAGHRIB

WRITING IN TIMES OF TURMOIL

Edited by
NICOLA CARPENTIERI
and **CAROL SYMES**

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Medieval Sicily, al-Andalus, and the Maghrib

THE MEDIEVAL GLOBE

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Volume 5

**Medieval Sicily, al-Andalus,
and the Maghrib**
Writing in Times of Turmoil

Edited by
NICOLA CARPENTIERI
and
CAROL SYMES

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Nicola Carpentieri and Carol Symes

Note on the Transliteration of Arabic

In this volume, Arabic has been transliterated with appropriate diacritical markings, except in the case of certain common proper nouns (e.g. Abbasid). At the same time, only terms that would be unfamiliar to most non-specialists have been italicized (e.g. *fitna*).

INTRODUCTION

NICOLA CARPENTIERI AND CAROL SYMES

BEGINNING IN THE seventh century, Muslim expansion into the western Mediterranean initiated a new phase in the long-lasting layering of heterogeneous peoples, confessions, and languages within that ecumene. Arabs and Berbers, Christians and Jews, Sunnī and Shīʿa Muslims, Greek and Latin speakers, among other peoples, all contributed to shaping shared and contested identities. Hybrid genealogies of knowledge can be traced back to the cultural interactions between these various groups. As for the political arrangements that emerged from their coexistence, they were as inclusive as they were fragile. The centralizing powers that gave western Islam its great urban centres—Palermo, Córdoba, Qayrawān—were often threatened by the centrifugal pull of factionalism, and the dialogues between cultural agents were never devoid of polemical tangents and confrontations. The political and cultural history unfolding between the sea's southern and northern shores oscillates between convergence and clash.¹

This dialectical relationship lies at the heart of the generative processes that literary, cultural, and art historians have only recently begun to address. With respect to textual, narrative, and linguistic connections, the pathbreaking work of Maria Rosa Menocal and Karla Mallette has been especially instrumental in forging new epistemological tools for the articulation of a “medieval Mediterranean lexicon” capable of embracing the uneven, but not fragmented, literary landscapes shared by Sicily, Iberia, and North Africa during the medieval period.² Scholars working in previously non-conversant fields—Byzantinists, Arabists, Romanists—have created new interfaces that have broken the seals of nationalist packagings; in the words of Sharon Kinoshita, we have begun “displacing the nation” in our examination of Mediterranean literary artifacts.³

This special issue follows in that trajectory, exploring “minor” narrative forms, proffering new approaches to well-known texts, and suggesting alternative readings of overarching genres moulded by turmoil in the western Mediterranean.

1 *Maghrib*: in Arabic, the regions west of Egypt; as opposed to *Mashriq*: the “East.”

2 Menocal, *Arabic Role, Ornament of the World; Literature of Al-Andalus*; Mallette, *Kingdom of Sicily*, “Poetries”; *A Sea of Languages*. Pioneering studies include those listed in the bibliography, but it is beyond the scope of this introduction to provide an exhaustive review of recent literature in the field.

3 Kinoshita, “Medieval Mediterranean Literature,” 602.

It is the product of a conference conceived in 2016 as part of a research project entitled “The Birth of Romance Literature: Iberia and Sicily at the Twilight of Arabo-Muslim Cultural Hegemony,” based at the Universitat Autònoma of Barcelona. This collective endeavour brought into new focus the Arabic poetry composed in times of political transition and shifting sovereignties. Surveying a corpus of eleventh- and twelfth-century Arabic verse, one detects some recurring patterns in Maghribī poems, as their authors grieved for and grappled with Islam’s loss of cohesion. Arabic poets of the West mourned their homelands in many lines of *tafajju’* (lamentation); as city after city fell to foreign invaders, they voiced their angst in the face of the Muslim community’s incapacity to defend itself. Elegies to the fallen cities (*rithā’ al-mudun*) of al-Andalus and Sicily multiplied, encoding a lexicon of loss.⁴ Indeed, the cultural ties that bound Sicily and Spain, as well as their similar histories, contributed to this lexicon’s rapid transformation into a new koiné.

Perhaps the most famous of the Andalusian elegies to a fallen city is Ibn Shuhayd’s “Elegy to Córdoba,” in which the poet (992–1035) celebrates the heyday of the Umayyad caliphate and ponders the calamitous civil war that caused its downfall.

دار قال الله عثرة أهلها فتبربروا وتغربوا تمصروا

An abode for whose people God has decreed a fall: they have become Berberized, mingled with the Moroccans, and adopted the creed of the Egyptians.⁵

In this epitaph-like line, Ibn Shuhayd mourns at once the demise of a city and its people. Like their once splendid capital, the Andalusians themselves have been fragmented. Scattered across the Mediterranean, they have foregone their former identity and adopted the customs of other peoples: Berbers, North Africans, Egyptians. Alexander Elinson has already called attention to these three groups and their specific meanings within the overall message of the elegy. The verb *tabarbara*, “to become berberized,” is loaded with a traditional Andalusian contempt and “carries with it a sense of backwardness, ignorance and, quite literally, barbarity.”⁶ Meanwhile, *tagharraba*, “to become Maghribī,” and *tamaṣṣara*, “to become Egyptian,” convey other racial and sectarian biases. The first is intended to distance al-Andalus from the Maghrib, perceived by the literary establishment as an intellectual and cultural backwater. The second alludes to the *shī’a/sunni*

⁴ See Elinson, “Loss Written in Stone.”

⁵ Elinson, “Loss Written in Stone.” Elinson’s translation has been adapted to offer a more literal reading.

⁶ Elinson, “Loss Written in Stone.”

rift that split the Muslim *Umma* in this age. With the Fatimids firmly established in Egypt, the place had now become indissolubly bound to their Ismāʿīlī doctrine, which Andalusian refugees would, according to Ibn Shuhayd's narrative, end up embracing. The poet thus acts as the defender of the caliphate and of the Arabic language, representing al-Andalus itself as much more than a western outpost of Islam. For him, it is a locus of sophistication and refinement, now destined for oblivion—were it not for the literary rescue carried out by his elegy.

By decrying the brutalization of diasporic Andalusians, Ibn Shuhayd also conveys a second, implicit message that would not be lost on the Andalusian recipients of the poem: an allusion to the confrontations between Arabs and Berbers and older versus newer settlers (that is, Andalusians versus “Moroccans”), which had ultimately caused the downfall of Córdoba during the so-called “Berber *fitna*.” This term figures prominently in Arabic accounts of the end of Umayyad rule in Iberia. Often translated as “civil war” or “dissension,” it captures the violent divisions within the Muslim *Umma* caused by the craving for material possessions, the lust for and love of the world. *Fitna* is at once a trial by God (the word originally refers to the process of purifying gold from the dross) and a sign of the community's loss of divine guidance.⁷ Thus, the intended audience would detect an underlying accusation: the disintegration of the Andalusian social fabric began at home during the civil war that condemned their city and destroyed their world.

Ibn Shuhayd's critiques echo in the verse of a Sicilian poet of the next generation, Ibn Ḥamdīs (ca. 1056–ca. 1133). Born during the Norman invasion of Sicily, Ibn Ḥamdīs was a witness to the calamitous political events that shook Muslim polities in his homeland, as well as in al-Andalus and the Maghrib throughout the eleventh and into the twelfth century.⁸ Muslim Sicily had ceased to exist as a unified political entity by the time of the poet's birth, fragmenting in circumstances analogous to those that caused the downfall of the Umayyads around the same time; as in al-Andalus, centralized rule in Muslim Sicily succumbed to fratricidal *fitna*. The dynasty of the Kalbids, the emirs who had ruled the island from their capital in Palermo for a century, had been riven by internecine squabbles over succession at the turning of the eleventh century. With the Kalbid princes at each others' throats, their vassals across Sicily proclaimed themselves independent, splitting the island into four large principalities whose continuous and debilitating infighting ultimately consigned Sicily to conquest by Norman invaders.

After leaving war-ridden and famine-plagued Sicily, Ibn Ḥamdīs landed in North Africa and subsequently joined the retinue of al-Muʿtamid ibn ʿAbbād, king

⁷ See Denaro, “And God Dispersed Their Unity,” in this issue.

⁸ See Nef, “La *fitna* sicilienne.”

of Seville (r. 1069–1091). But in 1091, the Almoravid invasion of al-Andalus put an end to the rule of al-Mu'tamid. After witnessing the deposition of his patron at the hands of fellow Muslims, Ibn Ḥamdīs left on a calamitous sea voyage which would end in shipwreck and the death of his beloved slave-girl, Jawhara. An exile once more, Ibn Ḥamdīs resumed a roving life, passing through the courts of precarious Muslim statelets in Majorca, Tunis, and Algeria. He was destined never to return to Sicily, his ancestral home, which was now fixed in the orbit of European Christendom. As William Granara has pointed out, Ibn Ḥamdīs' poetry can be read as a compelling historical testament to Islam's political decline in the western Mediterranean.⁹ His own odyssey maps out a world where Islamic sovereignty is compromised by internal discord and staggers under the blows of new political protagonists. His verse, meanwhile, encodes these new protagonists within the ancestral lore of the *qaṣīda* (Arabic ode), contributing to what we may call a Maghribī poetics of loss, as pioneered by his Andalusian forebear Ibn Shuhayd.¹⁰

Even as he mourned the loss of Sicily to the Normans, Ibn Ḥamdīs did not refrain from accusing the Muslims of Sicily of engineering their own downfall.

ولكنّ أرضي كيف لي بفكاكها	من الأسر في أيدي العلوج الغواصب
لئن ظفرت تلك الكلاب بأكلها	فبعد سكون للعروق الضوارب
أحينّ نقاني أهلها طوع فتنة	يضرّم فيها ناره كلّ حاطب
وأضحت بها أهواؤهم وكأنما	مذاهبهم فيها اختلاف المذاهب
ولم يرحم الأرحام منهم أقارب ¹¹	ترؤي سيوفاً من نجيع أقارب ¹¹

How can I free my land from her chains, in the hands of usurping barbarians?
If those dogs could seize their food, it was only after her veins had stopped
pulsing.

Didn't her people destroy one another at the beck and call of civil strife,
each lumberman stoking the flames of its fire?

The light of that fire revealed all their base desires: they bickered as if all
moved by different beliefs.¹²

Relatives had no mercy on each other, and quenched their swords' thirst
with the blood of their kin.¹³

⁹ Granara, "Ibn Ḥamdīs's al-Dīmās Qaṣīda."

¹⁰ Carpentieri, "Towards a Poetics of Aging."

¹¹ Arabic text in Ibn Ḥamdīs, *Dīwān*, 31; trans. Carpentieri.

¹² *Madhāhib*: schools of thought within Islamic jurisprudence.

¹³ See also Carpentieri, "At War with the Age"; Granara, "Ibn Ḥamdīs and the Poetry of Nostalgia."

Here, Ibn Ḥamdīs delivers a clear message to his audience, understood as the Maghribī Muslim community: the Normans would have been no match for the Sicilians had they managed to stand united instead of giving in to bickering and divisions. It was the Muslims, “her people,” and not the Normans, who broke Sicily’s heart and drained her life’s blood. This was an audacious message to deliver at this point in time, when Norman power in the Mediterranean was a growing threat for the Muslim principalities in North Africa. Ibn Ḥamdīs accordingly uses Sicily as a cautionary tale for North Africa’s Muslims princes, for whom he worked in his mature years. In particular, he denounces the “lumbermen” who had fomented and exploited sectarian divisions for their own benefit.

More broadly, the poet’s invocation of *fitna* and *madhāhib* (sects or beliefs) has the effect of framing the Sicilian downfall within “a narrative of defeat”—a point that one of our authors, Roberta Denaro, will explore in detail—whereby the loss of divine guidance is followed inevitably by military and political loss. Much like Ibn Shuhayd, Ibn Ḥamdīs stands as the censor of his own community, whom he both pities and accuses. He, too, conjures the spectre of sectarian antagonism as the great puppeteer behind the scenes of the Sicilian *fitna*. In the above verses, thus, he interweaves *fitna* with the Norman conquest, showing how religious transgressions give rise to a protracted civil war in which the Muslims of Sicily murder their own country, whose carcass falls into the grip of the rapacious Normans. Together, Ibn Shuhayd and Ibn Ḥamdīs also exemplify how this period of Islam’s political decline led to extraordinary new engagements and exchanges within the Maghribī community, between competitors and interlocutors.

This special issue explores how the internal struggles and political turmoil that convulsed these societies are reflected in a variety of writings; and how those writings, in turn, participated in these events and gave them specific narrative contours. Its seven contributions examine texts that reveal how rivalries and alliances—confessional, political, and ethnic—were a dialectic force driving new modes of literary exchange. Collectively, our authors address several broad questions: how did Sicilian, Iberian, and North African writers fashion the shared experience of civil strife? How did factionalism shape the themes and debates that animated Maghribī literature in this era? How can we decode the workings of polemic and synthesis that generated this “literature of turmoil”? And how did turmoil and trauma affect the material formats and genres of writing?

By tackling these questions, our authors explore the web of cultural and political ties that entangled Muslim Sicily and al-Andalus, North Africa, and Christian Europe from the ninth to the sixteenth century. Some of the texts they examine have already received significant attention; in such cases, our authors proffer new approaches that situate them in a global context, showing how modes of writing

travelled across geographical and cultural frontiers, and how writing “the Other” was inextricable from examinations of the self. Other contributions examine forms of writing that have been, thus far, at the periphery of academic interest and so cast new light on the literature of turmoil’s dialogical modes. In keeping with *The Medieval Globe*’s mission, every article is designed to be accessible and interesting to the non-specialist, while simultaneously engaging scholars already deeply familiar with the topics we address.

Maghribī Societies: Between Convergence and Clash

Contemporary travellers, poets, and scholars were fascinated by the similarities between Muslim Sicily and Muslim Iberia, comparing their environments, architectural styles, demographics, historical developments, and political institutions.¹⁴ Beyond their cultural affinities and remarkably similar histories, both were frontier states: the westernmost strongholds of Islam vis-à-vis Christendom. Ibn Jubayr, the twelfth-century Andalusian traveller, articulated this fascination in his description of Sicily, which he came to know after he was shipwrecked off the coast of Messina in 1185.

The prosperity of the island surpasses description. It is enough to say that it is a daughter of al-Andalus in the extent of its cultivation, in the luxuriance of its harvests, and in its well-being, having an abundance of varied produce, and fruits of every kind and species.¹⁵

Both regions also had close but complex relations with their North African neighbours. These relations were the result of geographical proximity, but also reflected the shared heritage of the Arabs and Berbers who, after the Muslim conquests of the Maghrib, settled these lands. But in spite of these common characteristics, the political interests of the two *jazīras*¹⁶ (*jazīra* is Arabic for both “island” and “peninsula”) came to diverge greatly from those of North Africa, as the two lands experienced their rise to autonomy. Finally, in their political twilight, both al-Andalus and Muslim Sicily had to negotiate new alliances with the North African kingdoms in order to guarantee their survival.

It is therefore not surprising that the more tumultuous pages in the shared mythology of Muslim Iberia find counterparts in those of Muslim Sicily. The Muslim invasion of Iberia (711 CE), at the legendary invitation of the Visigothic count

¹⁴ See Mandalà, “Figlia d’al-Andalus!”; Kapitaikin, “Daughter of al-Andalus.”

¹⁵ Ibn Jubayr, *Travels of Ibn Jubayr*, trans. Broadhurst, 339.

¹⁶ Mandalà, “Figlia d’al-Andalus!”

Julian, is paralleled by the Aghlabid invasion of Sicily (827 CE), at the legendary invitation of the renegade Byzantine general Euphemius. Both invasions were followed by protracted periods of negotiation between older and newer settlers pouring in from the North African coasts. The Muslim conquest of Iberia, in particular, was compromised by the fact that the Berber soldiers, who had done most of the fighting, felt defrauded when Arab elites favoured their own kinsmen in the distribution of lands and booty. The Berbers' simmering resentment exploded into open revolt in the first half of the eighth century, threatening to undermine the establishment of any cohesive polity. Further conflicts between North African Berbers and Andalusian Muslims would be a crucial factor in the collapse of the Umayyad caliphate of Córdoba, three centuries later. Muslim Sicily was also plagued by analogous ethnic and social rivalries throughout its history.

In both *jazīras*, relations between Muslim rulers and their Christian and Jewish subjects were also marked by conflict. While the *dhimma*¹⁷ granted these confessional groups protection and freedom of worship, confrontations and polemics were by no means eradicated. In this issue's first article, Andrew Sorber delves into one such early polemic by offering a new reading of the *Indiculus luminosus* (Enlightened Little List) by Paulus Alvarus (ca. 800–861). Alvarus, a Christian layman and possible convert from Judaism, wrote this brief treatise in the 850s as both an invective against Islam and a defence of the so-called Córdoba martyrs: a group of forty-eight individuals who, between 850 and 857, sought "martyrdom" by publicly attacking Islam and its Prophet. Rather than taking the *Indiculus* at face value, or even as an early formulation of Christian holy war ideology, Sorber explores how Alvarus sought to challenge Muḥammad's prophetic claims in order to convince his audience—the Christian elites of Córdoba, who had long accommodated themselves to Muslim rule—that the tenets of Islam were alien and antithetical to their own culture and interests. Sorber also underscores how Alvarus' appropriation of the prophetic legacy was part of an increasingly common strategy among Latin polemicists, in response to the success of Arab conquest and the Islamization of the Iberian Peninsula.

Remaining in Iberia, Natalie Levin transports us to the "golden age" of political stability and cultural flourishing that was achieved in al-Andalus under the Umayyad caliphate (929–1030). In 953, a monk called John of Vandières travelled from the abbey of Gorze to the capital at Córdoba as a diplomatic envoy for

17 *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, *dhimma*: "the term used to designate the sort of indefinitely renewed contract through which the Muslim community accords hospitality and protection to members of other revealed religions, on condition of their acknowledging the domination of Islam. The beneficiaries of the *dhimma* are called *dhimmis*, and are collectively referred to as *ahl al-dhimma* or simply *dhimma*."

the future Emperor Otto I, then king of East Francia. His extended visit there, the political goals and implications of his embassy, and his eventual meeting with Caliph ‘Abd al-Raḥmān III, were later memorialized in a section of John’s Latin *vita* which, as Levin demonstrates, was closely informed by literary tropes drawn from Arabic *adab*¹⁸ literature. The anecdotes popularized by this genre travelled widely throughout the Mediterranean, but Levin’s article sketches the fascinating transmission of one such tale as far as Lotharingia, and shows how the appropriation of its motifs was instrumental in strengthening Ottonian imperial messaging both within and beyond his turbulent realm.

The next two articles consider writings that responded to turmoil in the Maghrib during the tenth century: the result of wider Mediterranean processes as well as fractures internal to Maghribī Islam. At the turning of this century, both North Africa and Sicily were overtaken by the Fatimids, a Shiite dynasty that won a sweeping military victory over the Sunnī Aghlabid emirs of North Africa. From the capital of their new caliphate in Ifrīqiya,¹⁹ the Fatimids defied both the weakened authority of the Abbasid caliphs of Baghdād and the rising star of the Umayyad emirs of al-Andalus. However, the conquerors also had to seek compromises between the proselytizing mission of their Isma‘ilī Shiite doctrine and the dictates of realpolitik. Through propaganda and public disputations (*munāẓarāt*), they sought to negotiate their religious authority with the Mālikī Sunnī²⁰ establishment of North Africa. They also had to address the Muslims of Sicily, who had broken out into open rebellion against them and declared a highly symbolic allegiance to the Abbasid caliphate in Baghdād. Sicily would reach a period of political stability only after protracted clashes with Fatimid authorities. Muslims in al-Andalus also reacted with open defiance to the caliphal claims of the Fatimids, positioning themselves as Maghribī champions of Sunnī Islam: an aspiration symbolized by ‘Abd al-Raḥmān III’s own assumption of the caliphal title in 929.

Against this backdrop, Aslisho Qurboniev’s article focuses on the *munāẓarāt* between Sunnī Mālikī and Fatimid scholars in North Africa, revealing how they reflect the contention and uncertainty experienced by all participants. He draws on accounts by the traditionalist Sa‘īd ibn al-Ḥaddād (d. 915) and the Fatimid propagandist Ibn al-Haytham (d. after 953), each of whom produced

18 Meaning both “literature” and “manners,” *adab* encompasses anecdotal writings that celebrate urbanity, wit, hygiene, erudition, and linguistic competence.

19 This term had rather fluid connotations and its boundaries were not fixed; but it corresponds roughly to modern-day Tunisia and eastern Algeria.

20 Mālikīsm is one of the four schools of Sunnī Islamic thought.

texts that exemplify the hagiographical treatment of disputants on both sides. Within Mālikī ranks, to write a narrative of disputation was an act of saintly defiance against the Fatimids, who had undermined Mālikī hegemony in North Africa. As for the Fatimids, their propagandists (*dāʿīs*) used *munāẓarāt* to elevate their intellectual position and so leverage authority within the traditional establishment of the Mālikī *ʿulamāʾ*: the specialist scholars of Islamic sacred law. Qurboniev argues that, by venturing into the public arena, both groups sought to gain personal prestige and thereby enhance the position of their own social group through a sort of intellectual cold war that pitched Fatimids and their doctrine against the Sunnī establishment in North Africa and, by extension, against the authority of both the Umayyads in Iberia and the Abbasids in the East.

If turmoil was a motor of ideological writing, as exemplified by the *munāẓarāt*, it could also shape the forms and materialities of writing. The frequent military campaigns that accompanied political and social unrest in the western Mediterranean demanded that written communication be swift, confidential, portable, and effective. Orders had to be dispatched, reports conveyed to headquarters, and negotiations carried forward—sometimes through official correspondence, but also through brief textual messages (*ruqaʿ*). Alex Metcalfe guides us through the largely unexplored landscape of these written communications in both Fatimid North Africa and Sicily during the Norman invasion of the mid-eleventh century. He reveals that the *Sīrat al-Ustādh Jawdhar*, a biographical account of the eunuch and courtier who was chamberlain to the Fatimid caliphs until his death in 973, provides abundant records of these short messages, which are also referenced in a number of Arabic chronicles. Such messages are also attested in the Latin writings of Geoffrey Malaterra,²¹ a monk who immortalized the deeds of the Norman warlords Robert Guiscard (ca. 1015–1085), his brother Roger (ca. 1040–1101), and his son Roger Borsa (ca. 1060–1111). Later witnesses include illustrations in the presentation manuscript of the *Liber ad honorem Augustus*, written by Peter of Eboli for Henry VI, Holy Roman Emperor and King of Sicily, in 1196. Analyzing the precious testimonies to this vital but fungible form of correspondence, Metcalfe grapples with the problem of their seeming ubiquity but scant preservation, as well as the problems posed by their very brevity and ambiguity, and the interplay between orality and writing. He also calls attention to the vital roles played by the messengers who conveyed these diminutive *chartulae*.

21 This Geoffrey has recently been identified as a Norman Benedictine monk of Winchester's New Minster, who became the abbot of Burton-upon-Trent (Staffordshire) in 1085. When he was ousted for theft and mismanagement in 1094, he made his way to this newer Norman colony: see Symes, "Doing Things beside Domesday," 1073.

Writing the Twilight: History, Travel, and Romance

The end of Muslim rule in Sicily heralded the twilight of Islam's political sovereignty in al-Andalus. Umayyad Córdoba fell during the civil war (ca. 1009–1031) that pitted new Berber settlers against Andalusians: the so-called Berber *fitna*. Around the same time, Sicily's epicentre, Palermo, fell victim to sectarian strife: the Sicilian *fitna*.²² In both lands, local warlords exploited the turmoil by establishing independent kingdoms, the *taifas* (from the Arabic *ṭā'ifa*, faction), tearing apart the political and social fabric of Islam. As the Andalusian *taifas* were swallowed up by the North African dynasty of the Almoravids, the Sicilian *taifas* would be swept away by the Norman avalanche.

How did Muslim historians make sense of these calamities? Roberta Denaro's contribution offers an answer. Analyzing narrative patterns in historical accounts describing the end of Muslim rule, she suggests that they function as a counter-genre to that of the *futūḥāt*: a type of historiographical writing that celebrated the victories and conquests of Islam, particularly during its first phase of expansion. Denaro also positions these narratives of defeat within other, overarching Arabic historiographical trends, particularly the concept of *fitna*. Much like the verses of Ibn Shuhayd and Ibn Ḥamdīs, quoted above, this teleological topos figures defeat as the necessary outcome of moral deviance: when dissension fractures Muslim unity, God withdraws his favour. By surveying multiple Arabic chronicles devoted to the repulsion of Muslim campaigns in Europe, especially al-Ghāfiqī (d. ca. 1165) on Poitiers and al-Sulamī (d. 1106) and al-Nuwayrī (d. 1333) on Sicily, Denaro argues for a reading of these sources as “the antipodes of the *futūḥāt*.”

While Arabic historians and poets grappled with Islam's loss of sovereignty in the Mediterranean, Muslims travellers crossing the Middle Sea were confronted with a social landscape that was becoming ever more transcultural. Islam may have been losing to Christianity on the military and political fronts, but Christian victors were often yielding to the culture of the Arabic-speaking world they now inhabited, and they were eager to adopt its artistic, technological, and scientific advancements. Christians across Europe reaped the fruits of Arabic learning, while those living in Sicily and Iberia were deeply attracted to the sophistication of Islamic court culture and worked to emulate its rituals and aesthetics in their cosmopolitan cities. Walking through the streets of Norman Palermo, Ibn Jubayr was enraptured and awestruck by Christian churches built on Islamic models. In her article, Vanna Calasso compares his account of one such contemporary church, St. Mary's of the Admiral in Palermo, better known as the Martorana, with that of a monument from the distant past: the ancient Egyptian temple of Akhmīm. Ibn

22 Nef, “La *fitna* sicilienne.”

Jubayr's description of the former reveals his admiration for the achievements of Norman Sicily: the wealth of their churches, their "arabized" courts and "Islamicate" garb, and the tangible manifestations of deeper cultural syncretism. But by contextualizing his travelogue (*rihla*) within the discursive strategies exposed by Denaro, Calasso suggests that the author was also grappling with a personal and intimate *fitna*: the allurement and seduction of the exotic. Through his meditation on the afterlife of the Egyptian temple and the new vernacular Church of St. Mary, Calasso articulates a compelling parallel between narratives of public and private loss, survival and renovation.

A later tale of survival, renovation, and reinvention also seals our issue. Keith Budner's article follows the metamorphoses of a pan-Mediterranean love story whose protagonists had as many names as the languages of their tale: Floire and Blancheflor, Florios and Platziaflora, Florio and Bianciflore, and so on. The romance between a Christian damsel and a Moorish prince was rewritten at a series of historical junctures in the relationship between Christianity and Islam in Iberia. Examining two Spanish versions created between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries, Budner reads the *Flores* romance as a palimpsest of these relationships as they took shape in a time of Christian hegemony, investigating how these two redactions reflect the increasing subjugation of the Muslim community and Christian rulers' imperial ambitions within and beyond Iberia. By delving into the "mythopoeia of the Morisco²³ experience," Budner draws a compelling parallel between the redacted Flores romance and the narrative constructed by the Lead Books of Sacromonte: a collection of twenty-two volumes discovered in Granada at the end of the sixteenth century, which Morisco scholars claimed to be pre-Islamic Arabic texts written by Roman Christians (they are almost certainly a contemporary forgery). A further analogy is provided by an Italian avatar of the Flores romance: Boccaccio's *Filocolo*, which Budner addresses in the last section of his article. Through these comparative readings, Budner casts the forging of fictional pedigrees and the constantly re-imagined past as a process in dialogue with marked social and political changes in an Iberia that was no longer Muslim.

Together, these seven articles illuminate the writings that responded to critical moments and trends in the centuries of turmoil that shaped and reshaped the Mediterranean. They examine interfaith religious polemics and initiatives that bridged literary and cultural traditions, ephemeral messages exchanged in times of warfare and episodes of diplomacy, travel writing and romance, dialogue and disputation. Avoiding facile dichotomies that pit a monolithic Islam against medieval

23 The term is used to describe Iberian Muslims pressured into Christian conversion by the Spanish Crown during the sixteenth century, as well as to their descendants.

Christendom, our special issue testifies to shared discourses and aesthetics, as well as to rifts and rivalries. Rather than opposing binaries, these writings reveal a far more complex panorama of “internal otherness” that plays at least as important a role as religious conflict.²⁴ Indeed, turmoil itself emerges as more than a merely destructive force: it is also a dialectic force that propelled cultural production and even cultural synthesis. As medieval writers crafted their narratives of turmoil, they also documented the constant crossing of linguistic, social, artistic, and political boundaries largely erected by post-medieval nationalist, racist, and confessional narratives. Reading their writings with fresh eyes, our authors expose those modern fictions for what they are, and open a window onto a more diverse and elastic medieval world.

24 See Akasoy, “Al-Andalus.”

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Abstract The seven articles in this thematic issue address written responses to different periods of turmoil that impacted Muslim and Christian societies in the western Mediterranean from the ninth to the sixteenth centuries. By highlighting the complexities of the literary artifacts produced in Sicily, al-Andalus, and North Africa, it offers new perspectives on the interactions between Islam and Christendom at a time of traumatic transition from one political and religious hegemony to another, as reflected in a variety of genres: apologetic and hagiographical works, interreligious polemics, military and diplomatic dispatches, historiography, travel narratives, and romance. These analyses reveal a cultural panorama in which “internal otherness” and religious rivalry are both generative forces within a Mediterranean of fungible linguistic and social boundaries, where traditional genres are inflected and re-invented and new vernacular forms arise from multicultural and multi-confessional encounters.

Keywords: Mediterranean, Maghrib, Sicily, al-Andalus, Spain, Arabic literature, Latin polemic, vernacular romance, transculturation, Islam, medieval Christendom, Ifrīqiya, North Africa, Umayyads, Fatimids

THE *INDICULUS LUMINOSUS* AND THE CREATION OF A NINTH-CENTURY PROPHETIC CONFLICT BETWEEN CHRISTIANITY AND ISLAM

ANDREW SORBER*

"LORD, DECLARE YOUR words through my mouth; feed me the crumbs from your table as your hound, baying for you against the rabid wolf."¹ This prayer was written in 854 in Umayyad Córdoba by Paulus Alvarus (ca. 800–861), a Christian layman whose *Indiculus luminosus* (Enlightened Little List) survives as the earliest Latin treatise to deal extensively with the Prophet Muḥammad. While it enjoyed little success in subsequent generations, surviving in a single, damaged manuscript, scholars have studied the *Indiculus* as a glimpse into the so-called Córdoba martyrs' movement of the 850s, or more abstractly as evidence of early medieval Muslim–Christian interaction.² Between 850 and 857, forty-eight individuals "intentionally sought their executions in Córdoba," with some travelling a great distance to do so, "by publicly insulting the prophet Muḥammad and denying the truth of Islam, or refusing to return to Islam after apostatizing."³ Against this backdrop, Alvarus wrote a text that may have begun as a speech to the Christian elites of Córdoba, wherein he cast himself as a prophet to galvanize his Christian compatriots to assert their Christianity publicly and so oppose Islam and, by extension, the ruling regime. Through his *Indiculus luminosus*, Alvarus thus asserted his own prophetic authority in order to discredit that of Muḥammad, whom Alvarus imagined in this text as his opponent.

Modern scholarship has often interpreted the *Indiculus* as a defence of the recent martyrs, as a call to martyrdom or violent rebellion, or even as an early

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1 Alvarus, *Indiculus luminosus*, *Praefatio* [henceforth *IL*, *Praefatio*], 27. "Tu, Domine, per hos meum tua uerba sonare, tu canem tuum pro te latrantem contra rabidum lupum ex mense tue micis cibare."

2 For background and scholarship on the Córdoba martyrs, see Wood, "Persecution," 41–60; Aillet, *Les Mozarabes*; Tieszen, *Christian Identity*, 75–97; González Muñoz, "En torno a la orientación," 9–31; Hitchcock, *Mozarabs*, 35–40; Tolan, *Saracens*, 85–97; Wolf, "Muḥammed," 3–19; Delgado León, *Alvaro de Córdoba*, 11–44; Coope, *Martyrs*; Millet-Gérard, *Chrétien mozarabes*; Wolf, *Christian Martyrs*; Waltz, "The Significance," 143–59; Franke, *Die freiwilligen Märtyrer*; Colbert, *Martyrs*; Sage, *Paul Albar*.

3 Safran, "Identity and Differentiation," 573; cf. Monferrer Sala, "Mitografía hagiomartirial," 425.

formulation of holy war ideology.⁴ Further, these scholars tend to focus their analysis of the *Indiculus* on Alvarus's depiction of Muḥammad's sexuality or Alvarus' apocalypticism. None of these studies have, however, noted Alvarus' own prophetic claims and his adaptation of a mode of authoritative discourse, increasingly common in the politics of the Latin West, based upon claims of divine inspiration or revelation. This omission stems in part from the fact that, although Alvarus undoubtedly crafted much of his *Indiculus* to attack Muḥammad, he never used the Prophet's name: a point I will address below. Instead, weaving his own prophetic authority into the *Indiculus*, Alvarus worked to convince his Christian contemporaries that God supported his ideal of Christian behaviour and sought to undermine Muslim arguments for Muḥammad's prophethood. By privileging the claims of divine support and inspiration made in the *Indiculus*, this essay explores Alvarus's rhetoric and the motivations for creating the *Indiculus*. As a result, the reader can better comprehend Alvarus's concern regarding Muḥammad and his reason to challenge Muḥammad's prophethood directly.

To argue this point, I will first introduce the use of the prophetic discourse in the Latin West and offer a brief example drawn from one of Alvarus' Frankish contemporaries. I will then introduce the *Indiculus* and its author more fully, before exploring the text's three primary strategies: first, how Alvarus appropriates prophethood; second, how he uses prophetic authority to challenge Muḥammad's prophetic calling; and third, how Alvarus articulates ideal Christian behaviour toward Islam. Together, these three features form Alvarus' discursive strategy and reveal the overarching purpose of the *Indiculus*. While the common scholarly interpretation of the *Indiculus* describes the text as a polemic denouncing Muḥammad and calling out Christians "to oppose him in defense of the martyrs,"⁵ I will show how Alvarus actually *departed* from his earlier polemical style and cast himself as a prophetic challenger to Muḥammad. In so doing, I suggest that the text displays Alvarus' (and potentially his audience's) anxiety and fear of the existential threat posed by the Islamic Prophet for Christians in Córdoba and Christianity more broadly.

Prophetic Discourse in the Latin West

Prophetic interpretive authority, or simply the prophetic, are the terms I have chosen to describe what individual authors claim when they profess the ability to

⁴ For example, see Kedar, *Crusade and Mission*, 17; and Waltz's discussion of the historiography in "The Significance," 143–45.

⁵ Safran, *Defining Boundaries*, 93n19.

discern and interpret the will of God, especially within early medieval Latin political discourse. Such claims often involve the authoritative interpretation of divine communication as expressed through the media of natural events, scripture, or other revelatory means (including, but not limited to, dreams, visions, and *divina inspiratio*). Such prophetic interpretive authority became established as an acceptable and powerful mode of discourse within the politics of the Carolingian empire, al-Andalus's powerful northeastern neighbour, under the reign of Louis the Pious (r. 813–840), son of Charlemagne (r. 744–814). Louis sought out revelation and divine direction to authorize his royal edicts and policy, and as Louis continually sought divine direction, his spiritual and secular advisors, among other contemporaries, began to appropriate prophetic authority in attempts to engage in the highest levels of political discourse, to gain the attention of the emperor, and to influence him. By the 850s, when Alvarus wrote the *Indiculus*, more than a decade after the 840 death of Louis the Pious and the beginning of the civil war between his sons that tore the empire apart, individuals instrumentalizing the prophetic voice could be found at every level of Carolingian society.

One such individual, comparable to Alvarus, was Audradus Modicus, a suffragan bishop of Sens (r. 847–849) whose prophetic career ranged from 840 to 853.⁶ In the texts he produced, Audradus modelled the language and style of his revelations on the biblical prophets Ezekiel and Jeremiah. One of his revelations, for example, explained that on 1 March 845, while Audradus was praying, “the spirit of the Lord took me up in the highest, and the angel said to me: ‘Know that the Northmen [Vikings] will come to Paris and then return, and to this people is given ten years for penance.’”⁷ Positioning himself as an intermediary between God and the Franks, Audradus presented his revelations to Pope Leo IV and the West Frankish king Charles the Bald as presaging recent history and condemned various Frankish nobles by interpreting portents, predicting future catastrophes,

6 On the life and career of Audradus Modicus, see Mohr, “Audradus von Sens.” See also Apsner, *Vertrag und Konsens*, 190–201; Dutton, *The Politics of Dreaming*, 129; Levison, “Die Politik,” 239.

7 Audradus Modicus, *Liber revelationum*, 379–80. “Mense primo, vicesima die mensis, aurora diei eram orans ait Audradus salute ecclesiarum, ut daret deus cor poenitens omnibus et misereretur illis, et cecidit super me mentis excessus et rapuit me spiritus domini in excelsum. Et ait angelus ad me: ‘Scias Normannos Parisius esse venturos et inde reversuros et huic genti decem annos ad poenitentiam dari factum est autem, ut, ascendentibus Normannis per Sequauam fluvium, occurreret eis Karolus rex cum exercitu equitem et peditum. Et non potuerunt prohibere eos.’ Quin Parisius, sicut dominus dixerat, intrarent vigilia pascha V. Kal. Aprilis et Karolus apud monasterium sancti Dyonisii resedit. Et dederunt rex et populus Normannis pecuniam multam. Et reversi sunt in terram suam.” See Traube’s edition for parallels with scriptural prophetic language.

and proclaiming biblical prophecies as fulfilled before their eyes.⁸ Audradus' audience with Charles the Bald occurred in 853, the year before Alvarus wrote the *Indiculus* and similarly appropriated the prophetic, discursive mode to chastise and correct his audience.⁹ But while Audradus used his prophetic authority to address an embattled Frankish king, Alvarus used the same authority to challenge the authority of another prophet, namely Muḥammad.

Alvarus and the *Indiculus luminosus*

In his *Indiculus luminosus*, Alvarus addressed his co-religionists, who had recently condemned a group of Christians who had sought martyrdom by denouncing and insulting Muḥammad and Islam in front of the Córdoba *qāḍī* (judge).¹⁰ He wrote to convince Christian leaders that they erred in their opposition to the martyrs, and in their accommodation of Islam, and to challenge them to resist such behaviour in the future. Adopting Jerome's medical metaphor of "holy cruelty"¹¹—surgically and painfully removing a diseased part of the Christian community to save the whole—Alvarus understood such cruelty as the uncompromised practice and preaching of Christianity, public and combative, following the model of the scriptural prophets.¹² Revealing his and probably his audience's profound anxiety regarding what the revelations of Muḥammad meant for Christian truth claims, Alvarus presented himself as a prophet sent to do battle against Muḥammad, attacking Muḥammad's prophethood to an extent not seen before in the Latin West.

Franz Brunhölzl famously described Alvarus as a "master of prose," who was nevertheless "profoundly disturbed" and "often carried away by an unruly temperament."¹³ Alvarus' capacity for drama appears throughout his surviving works and his invaluable letter collection, sources which suggest that Alvarus was a

8 Mohr, "Audradus," 240–43.

9 For a brief overview of Audradus' message to Charles the Bald, see Kamphausen, *Traum und Vision*, 146–47.

10 For two studies of these incidents, see Wolf, *Christian Martyrs*; Coope, *Martyrs*.

11 *IL*, chap. 11, 284; cf. Tieszen, *Christian Identity*, 117–18; Franke, *Die freiwilligen Märtyrer*, 27.

12 *IL*, chap. 11, 284. "Et qui in suis contumeliis erecti, elati, superbi sunt et inflexi et contra ostes Dei humiles, mansueti, simplices apparent et quieti, discant tam a Christo rerum omnium Deo quam hab omnibus prophetis, apostolis seu patribus universis ad inlata obprobria propria existere humiles et deiecti et pro diuinitatis ulciscendum contemtum fortes et rigidos esse debere et non pietatem horum incongruam, set crudelitatem hanc sanctam utere."

13 Brunhölzl, *Geschichte*, 504–5.

well-connected and well-educated layman.¹⁴ He appears to have been a wealthy member of the Córdoba Christian elite, one who felt empowered to act as an arbiter and defender of Christianity within the city. Beyond the *Indiculus*, this calling to defend Christianity appears in Alvarus' polemical letter exchange with Bodo, a Frankish deacon at the court of Louis the Pious who had become a convert to Judaism.¹⁵ Alvarus' attacks on Bodo, who changed his name to Eleazar, along with his rabid defence of Christianity, have even led some scholars to suppose—with no substantial evidence—that Alvarus was himself a convert from Judaism.¹⁶ We do not know where Bodo-Eleazar was living at the time of their correspondence, or how they learned of one another's existence, but throughout their exchange Alvarus demonstrates a clear knowledge of Frankish political and religious culture and makes his first foray into adopting modes of prophetic discourse so popular at the Frankish court. However, we should be cautious in accepting Lucas Mateo-Seco's suggestion that Alvarus can act as a symbolic figure for all Christians in al-Andalus.¹⁷ While Alvarus remains one of the most well-attested Mozarabic individuals of the ninth century, his excellent education and rhetorical gifts, which were also used in conflict with many Córdoba Christian elites, suggest that Alvarus stood apart from his peers in many ways.

Opening with an invocational prayer and divided into thirty-five sections, the *Indiculus* is structured, roughly, in two parts. The first half accuses Córdoba's "pastors of Christ, teachers of the church, bishops, abbots, priests, nobles and officials"—the *Indiculus'* intended audience—of fighting against the Church by quickly condemning the voluntary martyrs (*spontanei martires*), and thereby compromising their own Christianity to appease the Muslim rulers in Córdoba. Alvarus contrasts the actions of three of the more well-known "*spontanei martires*" with the opposition by the Christian elites of Córdoba, describing in great detail one of the first of these martyrs, a man named Isaac. A former secretary to the Umayyad emir 'Abd al-Raḥmān II (d. 852), Isaac had publicly defamed Muḥammad before the Córdoba *qāḍī* Sa'īd b. Sulaymān and was subsequently executed.¹⁸ Introducing Isaac in the *Indiculus* as a proxy for all the recent martyrs, Alvarus reminds his audience that the emir's former secretary had acted solely "by the zeal of God, not by human urging; inspired by the divine, [Isaac] walked a path

¹⁴ Mateo-Seco, "Paulo Alvaro," 209–34; Delgado León, *Alvaro de Córdoba*, 15–22.

¹⁵ Riess, "From Aachen to Al-Andalus," 131–57; Lara Olmo, "La Polémica," 131–59.

¹⁶ Cabaniss, "Paulus Albarus," 102–4.

¹⁷ Mateo-Seco, "Paulo Alvaro."

¹⁸ Eulogius, *Memoriale*, 2.1.402; *IL*, chap. 12, 285. See also Safran, *Defining Boundaries*, 96.

not common in our times, but forgotten long before.”¹⁹ Alvarus stresses the divine inspiration that drove Isaac’s actions for two reasons: first, to argue that Isaac and the other martyrs were responding to an organized persecution akin to that which prompted the martyrs of Christian antiquity, and second, to argue that those Christian elites among his audience who opposed, or merely failed to support, the martyrs opposed God’s will. Yet despite Alvarus’ attempt to cast his audience’s behaviour toward the martyrs in simple, binary terms, other contemporary sources reveal a fractious opposition to the martyrs led by Reccafredus, bishop of Seville (r. ca. 850–ca. 860), and Saul, bishop of Córdoba. Reading the *Indiculus* alongside other sources demonstrates that Alvarus’ depiction of a neatly divided Christian community does not do justice to the reality he encountered.

The opposition of Córdoba’s Christian elites to the deeds of the martyrs can be understood within the context of the Umayyad emirate’s power structure, wherein the emirs employed individuals in key positions whose political fate depended entirely upon their loyalty.²⁰ These individuals included mercenaries, Jewish and Christian advisors, slave soldiers and eunuchs, and women from powerful Christian families. The Umayyad emirs used such individuals—directly loyal to, and dependent on, the emir himself—to counter the power of the more established Muslim nobles and groups who predated the Umayyad emirs’ arrival in al-Andalus. While it has been claimed that the “Umayyad hold on Spain was firm” by the ninth century,²¹ ‘Abd al-Raḥmān I and his successors only maintained their tenuous power as they neutralized the various *junds* (military divisions) and the *muwalladūn* (Muslims of mixed ethnicity) who relied in large part on their own clients and politically disadvantaged groups.²² As the seat of Umayyad power, Córdoba became the stage where much of the competition for power played out, where these groups competed for the stipends and positions at the emir’s disposal, and where each group attempted to articulate and affirm its power and position. Here, the Umayyad emirs insulated themselves behind eunuchs and slave soldiers while (of particular importance to this study) they controlled the appointments to positions of power within the city, extending from ambassadors to tax collectors, from Islamic judges to Christian bishops.²³ Against the rhythms

19 *IL*, chap. 12, 285. “Zelo Dei Ysaac religiosus non humana instigatione, set diuina comotus nec usitatum callem nostris temporibus, set obliteratum incedens antiquitus.”

20 Meouak, *Ṣaḡāliba*, 161–62; Wasserstein, “Inventing Tradition,” 269–97; Fierro, “*Mawālī*,” 211–13, 222, 226; de Epalza, “Mozarabs,” 183–205.

21 Tolan, *Saracens*, 85.

22 Meouak, *Ṣaḡāliba*, 161–62; Handler, “The ‘*abīd*.”

23 Coope, *Martyrs*, 65.

of this system, which had encouraged accommodation on the part of the Christian elites for nearly a century, Alvarus sought to galvanize his audience to take up the ideal of Christian leadership he championed.

The second half of the *Indiculus* therefore attempts to defamiliarize Alvarus' audience with Islam by using Jerome's *Commentary on Daniel*, Gregory the Great's *Moralia in Job*, and Christian scripture to reconfigure and vilify Muḥammad as a precursor to the Antichrist. If the rate of religious intermarriage evident among the voluntary martyrs and the rulers of al-Andalus reflects broader trends to any degree, then the major religious communities of al-Andalus experienced extensive interaction and integration at a basic level.²⁴ Further, some scholars have argued that because "full participation in the culture and society of al-Andalus was, at least theoretically, restricted to Muslims," many urban Christians either converted or adapted their lifestyles as much as possible while remaining Christian.²⁵ Regardless of whether or not Alvarus overstates the level of familiarity between Andalusian Christians and Muslims, however, he sought to remedy and eradicate it through invoking material from Jerome and Gregory, using it to create prophetic works similar to the prophetic books of the Old Testament. Through these adaptations, Alvarus argued that Christian sources had long prophesied the advent of Muḥammad, his followers, and the struggle against them in which Alvarus argued that they were now engaged.

Taking considerable liberties, Alvarus wove his own work into his patristic sources, clothing them in a form more recognizable to his Christian contemporaries while defending his apocalyptic depiction of Islam with examples of the linguistic acculturation and Islamization of Córdoba, especially among its youth. Alvarus argues that the apocalyptic drama he described was "confirmed more by the evidence of the eyes than by our eloquence of explanation."²⁶ After all, Córdoba, as the seat of Umayyad power in al-Andalus, was clearly a zone of interreligious contact and interaction, something attested even by Alvarus' own extensive, if flexible, knowledge of Islam. But through the *Indiculus*, Alvarus argues that these seemingly harmonious interactions actually made Córdoba the nexus of an apocalyptic struggle. Kenneth B. Wolf maintains that the *Indiculus* only had the "guise" of apocalypticism, since Alvarus primarily focused on Daniel and Job rather than

²⁴ While the essential study is Janina Safran's *Defining Boundaries*, for closer analysis of the interreligious marital practices in al-Andalus, see Coope, *Martyrs*; Barton, *Conquerors, Brides, and Concubines*, 21–25. See also Spector, "Women of the People"; Marin, "Marriage and Sexuality"; Coope, "Marriage," 164; Veronese, "Contextualizing Marriage."

²⁵ Wolf, "Muḥammad," 5. See also de Epalza, "Mozarabs."

²⁶ *IL*, chap. 21, 294: "quod magis oculorum indicio quam nostro expositionis conprobatur eloquio."

Revelation, and because it offered nothing concerning life after the end of Islamic rule;²⁷ yet these conclusions rely on a restricted definition of apocalypticism which does not correspond to the range of expressions evident throughout the early Middle Ages.²⁸ Alvarus clearly imagined himself, inspired by God, spearheading the defence against (first) those Christians who “watch silently in these last times as the persecution of the Antichrist is established”²⁹ and (second) against Muḥammad, the “shameless prophet” whom Alvarus sought to challenge with his own prophetic authority.

Alvarus as Prophet

In the tenth chapter of the *Indiculus*, Alvarus speaks on behalf of Córdoba’s Christian leadership, lamenting how “we have become mute hounds not strong enough to bark,” adding that he and his compatriots fulfilled Isaiah’s prophecy that “the watchmen are all blind, every hound is mute, not strong enough to bark.”³⁰ Four chapters later, Alvarus takes up the same language when he describes how the Christian leaders of Córdoba were “watchmen of the flock of God and honoured with holy orders, but they are scandalized as long as they fear to support the truth that is Christ by challenging falsehood publicly.”³¹ Alvarus carefully criticizes the blindness and weakness of the other watchmen and watchdogs of Córdoba’s Christian community while asserting his own prophetic voice and distinguishing himself from them as a true watchman.

In his introduction to the *Indiculus*, Alvarus seeks to ground this prophetic authority by describing himself as a “most miserable hound” through whom God

27 Wolf, “Muḥammad,” 16–17.

28 Palmer, *The Apocalypse*, 65.

29 *IL*, *Praefatio*, 270–72: “Hic liber ideo luminosus indiculus dicitur quia lumine que sequenda sunt docet et apertis indicibus hostem ecclesie”; *IL*, chap. 1, 272: “Peritissimorum mentibus catholice ecclesie”; *IL*, chap. 3, 276: “qui in nobissima tempora constituti Antichristi persecutionem conspiciunt muti.”

30 *IL*, chap. 10, 282–83. “Facti sumus, o fidei nostre si tamen dignatis esse consortes, canes muti non ualentes latrare. Impetum in nos est celestis bibliotece cultoris Iheronimi sanctissimi dictum, in quo hillut exponit profeticum: ‘Speculatores ceci omnes, uniuersi canes muti non ualentes latrare.’ ‘Muti ad loquendum contra aduersarios, in nostros rabidi canes sumus. Set Dei potius sequamur uias.’” See the notes in Gil’s edition for the parallel with Jerome.

31 *IL*, chap. 15, 287. “Huius extremi temporis designantem periculum, ‘scandalizati electi?’ Electi enim quia speculatores gregis Dei et sacris ordinibus decorati, set scandalizati dum veritatem que Christus est timentes publice contestare falsum conati sunt rourare.”

would “bring forward these chapters, inspired by [God], for future days, which will spread quickly throughout the world in the winning of souls.”³² In the introductory prayer, he sets himself up as Muḥammad’s opposite:

Lord, be a lamp to my feet, a light to my paths. Teach me your reasoning and defend your meaning with my mouth. As your servant, Lord, declare Your words through my mouth. Feed me the crumbs from your table as your hound, baying for you against the rabid wolf. For I did not rise to this cause according to confidence in myself, but according to You who enlivened the tongues of infants and the conversations of the mute.³³

Although he begins by praying for God to speak through him, inspire him, and direct him as a “hound” against the primary object of the entire text, the “rabid wolf”—Muḥammad—Alvarus articulates his own prophetic authority before directly challenging the Prophet of Islam. He does so by associating himself with Jeremiah when he claims that God has given him “strength to understand” and has “watched over him since he left his mother’s womb, not as a pagan, but as a believer.”³⁴ Alvarus continues to parallel Jeremiah as he prays for the Lord to “declare Your words through my mouth, feed me the crumbs from your table as your hound, baying for you against the rabid wolf.”³⁵ Alvarus thus sets the tone

32 *IL, Praefatio*, 270–71: “quatenus sol uerus oriens precordia nostra tenebrosa inluminet et fluuius ciuitatem Dei letificans dummosam [lege dumosam] mei pectoris inriget terram, ut lingua canis miserrimi, que tui per hec placere desiderat, non uitium loquacitatis, dum herrores impetit, contraat [lege contrahat], set te inspirante ea secuturo seculo proferat, que in animarum prestitum, in profectu legentum, in extirpatione omnium insolentum ante conspectu glorie admirabilis solii tui per tota seculorum volumina currat.”

33 *IL, Praefatio*, 271. “Esto, Domine, lucerna pedibus meis et lumen semitis meis, et doce me iustificationes tuas sensumque tuum meo ore defende. Tu, Domine, per hos meum tua uerba sonare, tu canem tuum pro te latrantem contra rabidum lupum ex mense tue micis cibare. Non enim ad hec ex me ipso fidens surrexi, set ex te, qui linguas infantum facis dissertas et mutorum”; cf. Psalm 118:105–6: “Lucerna pedibus meis verbum tuum, et lumen semitis meis. Iuravi et statui custodire iudicia iustitiae tuae.”

34 *IL, Praefatio*, 271. “Dedisti enim mici, pie conditor, intellegendi uigorem, inseruisti precordiis meis fidem et ex utero matris non gentilem actenus, set conserbasti fidelem nullo merito precedente, nulla iustitia prosequente, nullo opere hoc merente”; cf. Jeremiah 1:5: “Priusquam te formarem in utero, novi te: et antequam exires de vulva, sanctificavi te, et prophetam in gemitibus dedi te.”

35 *IL, Praefatio*, 271. “Tu, Domine, per hos meum tua uerba sonare, tu canem tuum pro te latrantem contra rabidum lupum ex mense tue micis cibare”; cf. Jeremiah 1:9: “Et misit Dominus manum suam, et tetigit os meum, et dixit Dominus ad me: Ecce dedi uerba mea in ore tuo.”

for the remainder of the text that, he claims, God inspired him to write in order to chastise his Christian audience and to discredit the claims of Muḥammad.³⁶

In his prophetic mode, Alvarus declares that any religious accommodation required of Christian officials in positions of power and prestige within the Umayyad government constituted the “danger of these last times,” since it would “cause the elect to stumble.”³⁷ These elect, Alvarus argued, were Christian leaders set as spiritual and secular watchmen over God’s flock, who nonetheless demonstrate their public cowardice by preferring to condemn Christians rather than the forces of the Antichrist, Alvarus’s shorthand for Islam as a whole.³⁸ Proclaiming God’s anger against the Christians of Córdoba, Alvarus asks his audience, “what do the environmental catastrophes, merciless weather, the immensity of the rain, or regional famines portend and declare except the wrath of the Lord and the very retribution that already threatens us?”³⁹ Interpreting recent natural disasters as easily recognizable portentous signs of divine anger, Alvarus then asks how much more his audience ought to fear the even greater signs of divine displeasure, including the destruction of their churches and holy places by the “heathens,” the taxes forced upon them, and the frequent wars surrounding them.⁴⁰ By proclaiming and interpreting the threatening divine anger, Alvarus ultimately warns his listeners that “we must open the eyes of our hearts and see the just judgment of the Lord about to be brought forth against us.”⁴¹ Alvarus again couches

36 *IL*, *Praefatio*, 271. “Set ne ex hoc quod mici, exellentissime Domine, concessisti, ut temerarius arguar, ut iniquus excutiar, ut usurpator condemner, tremens et pallidus ergo, taudius gemensque suspiro, ne qui per devia et abrupta, per inania et caduca, per tumida et stulta, per dedecora et elata, per leuia et inflata operibus inseruiendo sinixtris cotidie ambulo.”

37 *IL*, chap. 15, 287. “Nonne prespicuum est quod isti omnes mendacium fuerunt professi et secundum ueritatis dictum, huius extremi temporis designantem periculum, scandalizati electi?,” cf. Matthew 24:10, 24.

38 *IL*, chap. 15, 287.

39 *IL*, chap. 18, 290. “Quid enim aerum incomoditates, quid inclementia celi, quid immensitas imbrum, quid fames populorum nisi iram Domini clamant et uindictam iam iamque imminere minitant et intentant?”

40 *IL*, chap. 18, 290. “Templa enim Christi a sacrificio desolata et loca sancta ab ethnicis extirpata et a public<an>o eodem [loca Dei dextructa] censa crudeliter adgrauata per incomoditates aerium et disturbanceones gentium et incursiones uindicauit preliorum. Hen enim omnis plaga fidelibus ad premium proficit, infidelibus ad supplicium crescit.”

41 *IL*, chap. 19, 291. “Aperiamus ergo oculos cordis et iudicium Domini iustum in nobis uideamus seuisse.”

such warnings within the words of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, bemoaning the imminent fate of an unrepentant people whom God has tried to save.⁴²

Alvarus then pivots from castigating his audience to identifying the figure he perceives as their actual threat, the Prophet Muḥammad. In the second half of the *Indiculus*, Alvarus summarizes what he claimed God has revealed to him: first, he unfolds his ideal of Christian behaviour; second, he proclaims Muḥammad as a precursor to the Antichrist prophesied by Daniel; and third, he predicts the approaching end of Islamic rule, which he calculates using both Christian and Islamic calendrical systems.⁴³ In order to demonstrate his ideal of uncompromised Christian behaviour, or the “holy cruelty” he espoused, Alvarus situates Islam—always personified for him by Muḥammad—within salvation history, interpreting the prophecies of Daniel as revealing Islam’s rise and successes as well as predicting its rapidly approaching failure. Immediately after proclaiming that Islamic rule would last only sixteen more years, Alvarus turns the audience’s attention toward his favourite subject—himself—urging his audience to “leave such [revealed] knowledge to God alone and to those who, by the touch of the Divine Spirit, are able to ascend with Moses into the cloud and consider the secrets of God revealed to his shining face.”⁴⁴ Alvarus sought to depict himself as part of that enlightened group alongside Moses, and this self-image became most pronounced as he attacked Islam directly.

Defamiliarizing Islam with the “Evidence of Our Eyes”

Although Alexandra Cuffel has described Alvarus’ polemical exchange with Bodo, the Christian convert to Judaism, as “the most graphic of the early medieval [polemics] from Latin Europe,” the polemical and offensive language of the *Indiculus* darkly overshadows that correspondence.⁴⁵ To incite the “holy cruelty” he wished to inspire, Alvarus utilizes his extensive and sophisticated knowledge of Islam in order to defamiliarize his audience with the religion of their Umayyad rulers.⁴⁶ He does so by recontextualizing their understanding

⁴² *IL*, chap. 19, 291. “Ne nobis illut Iheremie conueniat dictum: ‘Interfeci et perdidit populum meum et a uiis suis non sunt reuersi.’ Et iterum: ‘Multo lauore sudatum est et non exiuit ab ea nimia rubigo eius neque per ignem. Inmunditia tua exacrauilis, quia mundare te uolui et non es mundata a sordibus tuis’”; cf. Jeremiah 15:7 and Ezekiel 24:12–13.

⁴³ *IL*, chaps. 20–21, 291–95. Wolf, “Muḥammad,” 8.

⁴⁴ *IL*, chap. 22, 295. “Nos uero hec Dei soli intelligentie relinquimus et eis qui diuino spiritu tacti possunt cum Moyse nubem conscendi et occulta Dei eo reserante clara facie intueri”; cf. Exodus 34:29.

⁴⁵ Cuffel, *Gendering Disgust*, 80–81.

⁴⁶ Coope, *Martyrs*, 50; For Alvarus’s knowledge of Islam, see Wolf, “Muḥammad,” 13.

of, and direct experience with, Islam: focusing on salacious legends about the Prophet, as well as attacking everyday Muslim rites and prayers. Attempting to sow uncertainty by demonstrating that Muḥammad is alien and threatening to their Christian worldview, Alvarus devotes more than half of the *Indiculus* to attacking and delegitimizing Muḥammad's prophethood in a way that he felt would resonate powerfully with his audience. To take one salient example, Alvarus adapts Jerome's comments on the *rex inpudens*, the "shameless king" prophesied in Daniel 8, whom Jerome interpreted as a successor to Alexander the Great.⁴⁷ Without indicating where Jerome ends and his own authorial voice begins, Alvarus folds an extensive and inflammatory account of Muḥammad's life into Jerome's discussion.⁴⁸ Alvarus carefully crafts this inflammatory diatribe from available Christian and Islamic sources to challenge Muḥammad's prophetic claim, first by disputing the existence of Muḥammad's angelic messenger and second by attributing to him and to his followers flagrant, almost bestial, sexual excesses.⁴⁹

While Alvarus avoids naming Muḥammad explicitly, possibly because the ruling emir shared the name, he uses various explicit terms to denote him, including *vates* (prophet or seer), *propheta* (prophet), *pseudopropheta* (false prophet), and the adjectival *legifera* (law-giving) in reference to his rulings.⁵⁰ Since Alvarus also uses the attribute *legifer* to describe Moses, its application to Muḥammad suggests the centrality of *lex* (law) in his understanding of Muḥammad's prophethood. Alvarus here contrasts the true *lex Dei*, the law of God, with Muḥammad's *legifera sanctio*, his "law-giving authorization," which Alvarus argues that Muḥammad had usurped unworthily.⁵¹ Alvarus further argues, broadly alluding to the Old Testament prophecies of Daniel, that Muḥammad did not announce a true law at all, but something only "similar to a law."⁵² This law, Alvarus claims, demanded the worship of a god "who they call Cobar, meaning 'the greater,'" whose name (Alvarus alleges)

⁴⁷ *IL*, chaps. 26–27, 300–302; cf. Daniel 8:23. "Et post regnum eorum, cum creverint iniquitates, consurget rex impudens facie, et intelligens propositiones."

⁴⁸ For an investigation into this passage, see Wolf, "Muḥammad."

⁴⁹ Monferrer-Sala and Cecini, "Once Again on Arabic 'Alkaufet'."

⁵⁰ For example, see *IL*, chap. 3, 276: "eorum vates"; *IL*, chap. 6, 278: "vates impudicus"; *IL*, chap. 11, 283: "Moyses legifer"; *IL*, chap. 15, 287: "seudoprophetam" [sic]; *IL*, chap. 21, 293: "prophetas"; *IL*, chap. 23, 297: "impurissimus vates."

⁵¹ *IL*, chap. 30, 307. "Set huius legifera sanctio prunas ardere facit, quia carnali desiderio et amore caduco cultores proprios replet et iugi ambitione ut ardeant quibusdam exemplis et regulis docet."

⁵² *IL*, chap. 31, 310. "Que ita et simulatione seuiret legis et terrore premeret potestatis super terra ei non repperitur similis."

Muḥammad's followers shout from their towers daily.⁵³ Alvarus expected his audience to be familiar with, and certainly to understand, the words used in the Islamic call to prayer; and yet he blatantly misinterprets the phrase *Allāhu akbar* (God is most great) as a reference to a pagan god, thereby seeking to subvert their perception of Islamic monotheism.⁵⁴ In this way, Alvarus asserts that Muḥammad set himself apart from other heathens and heretics who claimed to have visions because none of them had dared "to usurp, in an exchange, the *testamentum* of God."⁵⁵ Thus Alvarus begins to challenge Muḥammad's worthiness by depicting him as unfit to receive any law.

In an effort to delegitimize Muḥammad's prophethood further, Alvarus attacked on two fronts: first, he argues that Muḥammad's "law" had been inspired by demons, delivered by a false angel in the guise of Gabriel, and prophesied as false by the apostle Paul; second, he argues that, because of Muḥammad's hypersexuality, he was unworthy to receive divine revelation.⁵⁶ Alvarus' attacks wove pre-existing polemical material on the marital life of Muḥammad into Jerome's treatment of the *rex inprudens* of Daniel 8:23, and also freely adapted Pope Gregory the Great's discussion of Job's Behemoth and the Leviathan: two monstrous creatures whom Gregory (r. 590–604) allegorically interpreted as manifestations of the devil.⁵⁷ The former allows Alvarus to attribute bestial sexual practices to Muḥammad, while the latter was introduced to symbolize Muḥammad's ruthless political power.⁵⁸ While we do not know the extent of his audience's familiarity with the historical life of Muḥammad, Alvarus' next topic suggests that he used available Christian and Islamic material to reinforce or reconfigure common perceptions of Muḥammad and his followers, as well as to

53 *IL*, chap. 25, 298–99. "Quod iste in fumosis turribus cotidie barritu inormi et monstruoso hac ferarum ri<c>tu, dissolutis labiis et faucium iatu aperto ut cardiaci uociferant hac uociferando uelut furiosi preconant, ut muniant Maozim cum Deo alieno, quem cognovit, id est, ut Maozim, quem illi Cobar vocant, hoc est, maiorem, cum Deo alieno, id est, demone illo qui ei sub persona Gabrihelis apparuit, uno uenerationis nomine muniat, ut per hoc horrorem suum in corda credentium tegat, dum nomine maioris Dei ritum uociferationis extollit et supprestitioso conatu, nefando spiritu, nobilium animas inficit."

54 *IL*, chap. 25, 299. "Maozim, quem illi Cobar vocant, hoc est, maiorem." For an investigation of Alvarus's use of Arabic, see Monferrer-Sala and Cecini, "Once Again on Arabic 'Alkaufet'."

55 *IL*, chap. 8, 280: "tamen nullus eorum testamentum uice Dei presumtus est usurpare."

56 *IL*, chap. 8, 280; *IL*, chaps. 23–24, 296–97; cf. Cecini, "Albarus' Verteidigung," 117–19.

57 *IL*, chaps. 26–27, 300–302. For Gregory's discussion of the Behemoth and Leviathan, see Gregory the Great, *Moralia in Job*, especially in 143B:1644–45.

58 For Alvarus's hyper-sexualized treatment of Muḥammad's life, see Wolf, "Muḥammad," 8–12.

discredit contemporary acceptance of religious intermarriage.⁵⁹ By 854, when the *Indiculus* was written, seven of those who had died as “spontaneous martyrs” could claim both Christian and Islamic parentage. While such marriages might have been common, possibly following the examples set by the Umayyad emirs and their non-Muslim wives, the writings of local Mālikī jurists and Christian prelates both suggest that intermarriage remained problematic for many of the relatives and intellectuals involved on all sides.⁶⁰

Prophetic Resistance and Apostolic Preaching

As Alvarus exploits the social and religious tensions created by such marriages, within both the Christian and Islamic communities, he begins to describe and exemplify the new ideal he sought to instill in his audience. Recalling two of the recent martyrs, both of mixed religious parentage, Alvarus sets them up as examples, prefacing his allusion by reminding his audience of the liturgical curse they themselves repeated annually, anathematizing anyone who despised, blasphemed, or expressed hatred for God.⁶¹ Alvarus warns his audience that God similarly and perpetually curses all who refuse to go to the aid of His servants. Alvarus then praises a biblical figure who, like the martyrs, embodied Alvarus’s ideal: Jahel from Judges 5, a woman who married a Kenite—that is, *not* an Israelite—and yet still killed Sisera, the commander of the Canaanite army fighting Israel.

“Curse the land of Meroz, says the angel of the Lord” prophetically thundering the wisdom of God; “curse the inhabitants of this land who did not go to the aid of its most powerful. Bless Jahel, wife of Haber the Kenite: when asked for water, she gave milk and offered butter in a princely dish. She took in her right hand the tent-spike and in her left the craftsman’s hammer and struck Sisera, seeking the weak spot in his head, and powerfully pierced his temple.”⁶²

⁵⁹ Cf. Safran, “Identity and Differentiation,” 575.

⁶⁰ Cf. Safran, “Identity and Differentiation,” 575; Barton, “Marriage across Frontiers,” 1–25; Nirenberg, “Conversion, Sex, and Segregation,” 1065–93.

⁶¹ *IL*, chap. 7, 279: “de quibus dicitur: Maledicti omnes qui spernunt te et omnes qui blasphemant te; maledicti omnes qui oderunt te et omnes qui dixerint in te uerbum durum [...] Angelus namque Domini maledicere iussit habitatores terre illius qui tantum in auxilium fortium Domini non uenerunt”; cf. *Canticum LIII*, *Canticum de libro tobi* [cf. Tobit 13:16], in *The Mozarabic Psalter*, 173.

⁶² *IL*, chap. 8, 279. “Profetalis, immo Dei sententiam intonat: Maledicite terre Meroz, dixit angelus Domini; maledicite habitatoribus eius qui non uenerunt ad auxilium fortissimorum eius. Benedicite lahel uxor Barcennei: aquam petenti lac dedit et in fiala principis obtulit

By choosing Jahel, Alvarus alludes to two well-known young women from among the recent martyrs, Flora and Maria, whose public affirmation of their Christianity and subsequent deaths had this scriptural precedent of courage displayed by another woman of mixed parentage. In contrast to those who followed Archbishop Reccafredus of Seville in condemning the martyrs, Alvarus praises the actions of Jahel for their prophetically validated violence, urging his audience to either “learn manliness from women raised from the enemy” or “be ashamed to be overcome by the female sex.”⁶³ To this, Alvarus, anticipating his audience’s reaction to the accusation of being surpassed by two young women, adds smugly: “that appears as the ultimate sacrilege to all [of you]!”⁶⁴

Underscoring God’s approval of Jahel, and those who act like her, Alvarus equates her with his conception of ideal Christian behaviour. Citing similar acts of “holy cruelty,” he describes Elijah’s righteous slaughter of the four hundred priests of Baal (1 Kings 18:40); Moses’s command to the Levites to kill three thousand of the children of Israel (Exodus 32:27–28); the Lord killing Dathan and Abiram (Numbers 16:27–35); God’s rejection of “pious Saul” (*pium Saulem*) for sparing King Agag, and God’s choice of “wild Samuel” (*Samuelem trucem*) for killing said king (1 Samuel 15:8–33).⁶⁵ Further instances that support Alvarus’s ideal and the prophetic authority undergirding it include a contrast between the “undisciplined kindness” that cost Eli his priesthood (cf. 1 Samuel 7) and Saul his kingship (cf. 1 Samuel 15) with the “holy cruelty” that Alvarus saw in Peter’s and Paul’s preaching to Simon Magus (Acts 8:18–25), Elymas (Acts 13:8–11), and Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:5,10).⁶⁶

Equating Old Testament violence and the New Testament’s uncompromising proselytization, Alvarus calls for his audience to emulate this behaviour and to loudly and visibly affirm their Christian identity. Indeed, through his attacks on Muḥammad’s prophethood and affirmation of his own prophetic status, Alvarus sought to do more than merely describe ideal Christian resistance to another religion: he sought to become its clearest example. Rather than delivering a call to martyrdom, a Christian mission focused on conversion, or a violent conflict,

butirum. Sinixtra manu misit ad clabum et dextera ad fabrorum malleum percussitque Sisaram, querens in capite uulneris locum et tempus ualide perforans”; cf. Judges 5:23–26.

63 *IL*, chap. 8, 280: “profetalis in conuentu plebium inspiratio benedixit [...] saltim a feminis discant uirilem de hostibus adorem sublimari tropheum, et sexus fortior pudeat sexu superari femineo”; cf. Coope, *Martyrs*, xv–xvii.

64 *IL*, chap. 8, 280. “Postremo quod omnibus sacrilegum esse uideuitur [*lege uidebitur*].”

65 *IL*, chap. 11, 283–84.

66 *IL*, chap. 11, 284–85: “indisciplinatam molledinem [...] crudelitatem exorationem.”

Alvarus argues that Christian elites need to preach publicly against the religion of the Umayyad establishment, rather than against their own co-religionists. Such preaching would bring, as Alvarus describes it, “to the preachers an appropriate reward and to the despisers the most just eternal punishment without end.”⁶⁷

Conclusion

In the *Indiculus luminosus*, Alvarus strove to convince his peers, the Christian elite of Córdoba, to oppose Islam publicly, using a direct language and polemical style to which they would have to respond. By appropriating prophetic authority from a long line of prophets, apostles, and fathers of the Church, Alvarus proclaimed—while simultaneously demonstrating—that his audience could adopt similar statements of uncompromising zeal. At the same time, this prophetic authority belonged to a broader trend within the political discourse of divine inspiration that was increasing throughout the ninth-century Latin West. By revealing the systemic inability of any group or individual to control or monopolize such authority exclusively, Alvarus is one example, among many, of those laymen who used the same rhetoric as their ecclesiastical and political peers to amplify their position and influence. But unlike his contemporaries elsewhere in the Latin West, Alvarus appropriated prophetic authority in order to contest the prophethood at the basis of Islam, as Alvarus and/or his audience understood it.

From within the framework of authority which he articulated, Alvarus sought to incite his audience to oppose Islam verbally and publicly, and to support those who did likewise. To this end, Alvarus attempted to recontextualize his audience’s daily encounters with Islam, defamiliarizing the religion by presenting Muḥammad as a precursor of the Antichrist prophesied by scripture and the patristic fathers as a “usurper” of the prophethood he claimed, and thus someone whom the Christians of Córdoba must openly oppose.⁶⁸ Perhaps unsurprisingly, the *Indiculus* appears to have enjoyed little contemporary success and even less lasting influence. Nevertheless, it survives in a single manuscript as a crucial witness to how an early medieval Christian intellectual understood and sought to influence relations between Christians and Muslims in al-Andalus.

⁶⁷ *IL*, chap. 10, 282: “predicatoribus inferatur deuotum premium et contemtoribus iustissimum eternum sine fine supplicium [*lege* debitum praemium]”; cf. Tieszen, “From Invitation to Provocation,” 30–31.

⁶⁸ *IL*, *Praefatio*, 271. “Set ne ex hoc quod mici, excellentissime Domine, concessisti, ut temerarius arguar, ut iniquus excutiar, ut usurpator condemner, tremens et pallidus ergo, taudus gemensque suspiro.”

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Abstract This article reappraises a frequently misunderstood witness to relations between Christianity and Islam in ninth-century al-Andalus, the polemical *Indiculus luminosus*. Written in 854 by Paulus Alvarus, a lay Christian in Umayyad Córdoba, the *Indiculus* attempts to incite opposition to Islam among the Christian elites of the city by appropriating the language of prophetic authority, increasingly used throughout the Latin West, in imagined opposition to the Prophet Muḥammad. Alvarus's *Indiculus* reflects his—and his intended audience's—profound anxiety about Islam in the wake of the Córdoba matrydoms and it attempts to discredit Muḥammad while simultaneously alienating Christians from the familiar religion to which they had long accommodated themselves within the Umayyad emirate.

Keywords: prophecy, prophetic authority, medieval Christendom, Latin polemic, Muḥammad, Paulus Alvarus, *Indiculus luminosus*, Córdoba, Umayyads, Louis the Pious, martyrs, conversion

EMPIRE AND CALIPHATE IN THE LIFE OF JOHN OF GORZE

NATALIE DAWN LEVIN*

JOHN OF VANDIÈRES, a monk from the abbey of Gorze in Lotharingia, travelled to Córdoba in 953 as an envoy for the future Emperor Otto I, then king of the East Franks (r. 936–973). The three years he spent on this mission were immortalized in the final twenty-one of the surviving 136 chapters of the anonymous *Vita Iohannis abbatis Gorziensis* (*Life of John of Gorze*). Scholarship on this text generally concerns either John's career at Gorze or his mission to Córdoba, with little effort to tie these topics together. This article presents a close reading of the description of John's time in Córdoba, revealing the political context of the text's composition and its concern with strengthening Otto II's imperial messaging within his turbulent realm—rather than his attempts to engage in competition with foreign powers such as the caliphate. It also demonstrates that John's *Vita* relies on an Arabic source to explain his diplomatic work in Córdoba and utilizes literary tropes from the *adab* genre, adopted from Persian into Arabic literature in the third/ninth century, in order to portray John and the king he served as significant political actors with influence well beyond Gorze and the Ottonian realm.

The *Vita Iohannis* exists in one manuscript (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France lat. 13766) thought to date from the late tenth or eleventh century. Its attribution to John, abbot of Saint-Arnould in Metz—initially suggested by the Maurist scholar Jean Mabillon (1632–1707)—has generally been accepted, placing the writing of the text in the 970s. However, there is no consensus about how or in what order the *Vita* was composed. Some scholars have argued that it was written in distinct stages and that the chapters concerning John's visit to Córdoba were based on a pre-existing dossier drafted by an eyewitness.¹ It is certainly apparent from the text's internal prefaces and structure that it was not written in one continuous stream; however, this need not mean that the *Vita* is a disjointed pastiche. Indeed, other scholars contend that the text displays a strikingly cohesive style

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1 John of Saint-Arnould, *Vita Iohannis*, 23–25; Walther, "Der gescheiterte Dialog," 32; Keller, "Das Kaisertum," 329–37.

marked by long speeches and dialogues.² While the *Vita* clearly contains passages borrowed from earlier texts, this does not allow for a reading of the final section as an unadulterated reflection of the events of 953. Rather, the hagiographer's relatively eclectic combination of sources gives modern readers a glimpse of the archival materials available near Metz at the time, and it also helps us to understand the contours of the author's political agenda.

The description of the embassy opens with the Umayyad caliph 'Abd al-Raḥmān III (r. 912–961) making an initial contact with the emperor, having been impressed by Otto's victories over various peoples. He sends a bishop, bearing what the *Vita* describes as a blasphemous letter, to Otto's court, in order to establish a diplomatic friendship; but the bishop dies there after having been detained for some time. Wishing to send a rebuttal to the letter, Otto asks his brother Adalbert of Metz (r. 929–954) to nominate a monk to serve as emissary, and John is chosen. Accompanying him is one of the original Córdoba emissaries, who rushes ahead with a copy of Otto's letter, for fear of returning empty-handed from his mission. The *Vita* does not reproduce the texts of these letters, so their contents are a matter of speculation to the reader, and likely to the hagiographer as well.

However, the *Vita* does report that rumours start to circulate in Córdoba about the letter's contents, which are supposedly offensive to Islam. Hence, concerned magnates (*primates*) alert the caliph, who in turn sends representatives to dissuade John from presenting the letter. First comes the Jewish physician, customs minister, and diplomat Ḥasdāy Ibn Shabrūt, who warns John of immutable laws requiring anyone insulting Islam to be executed.³ Some months later, a local bishop implores John not to imperil the local Christian community by presenting the letter, and invites him to visit the caliph with gifts only. Over a month passes, and again envoys try in vain to convince John to agree to a meeting without presenting the letter. But John insists that he deliver the letter as Otto had instructed, and the caliph—simultaneously impressed and frustrated with his tenacity—threatens to have John and the entire Christian population killed if he presents the missive. John then dictates an impassioned response, detailing the tortures he is willing to endure: an episode that stands in for the confrontational scene preceding a martyrdom that typically provides the climax in such hagiographical narratives.

2 Manitius, *Geschichte*, 3:192; Berschin, *Biographie*, 113; Karpf, *Herrscherlegitimation*, 86–94; John of Saint-Arnould, *Hystoria*, 67–68.

3 Ḥasdāy served 'Abd al-Raḥmān III in the 950s, in negotiations between Ordoño III of León and Toda of Navarre concerning rival claims to the throne of León. He also participated in receiving a Byzantine delegation in 949, and is credited with helping to translate the Dioscorides manuscript which had been sent as a gift from the emperor: see El-Hajji, *Andalusian Diplomatic Relations*, 73–76. On his correspondence with the Khazar king Joseph, see Drocourt, "Al-Andalus," 70–77; and Golb, "Diplomatic Correspondence."

The caliph, in an attempt to avert John's avowedly desired outcome, sends another envoy named Recemundus to Frankfurt, to whom Otto passes along instructions for John to suppress the offending letter, present his gifts to the caliph, and focus on making some kind of "alliance and pact concerning the infestation of petty Saracen brigands" (*amicitiam pacemque de infestatione latrunculorum Sarracenorum*).⁴ The caliph rewards John's impressive tenacity by privileging his meeting over that of Recemundus, after the latter has returned to Córdoba. The caliph even sends money to John, to purchase attire fit for such a meeting, but John replies that he cannot wear anything except his monk's habit. Again, the caliph admires John's tenacious spirit (*constantem animum*) and John is led along an extravagant procession to the caliph, who acknowledges John's long and difficult wait and assures him that he will receive whatever he requests. John immediately warms to the caliph, abandons the fiery speech that he had prepared, hands over the gifts, and then asks to leave. The caliph insists that they spend more time talking, after waiting so long, and they have a second meeting in which they boast to one another about their respective realms. Just when the caliph begins criticizing Otto for failing to suppress his rebellious subordinates and falling prey to the Magyars, the text ends abruptly, evidently unfinished by the author or the scribe.

The *Vita* mentions three motivations behind the diplomatic contacts that John negotiated between Otto I and 'Abd al-Raḥmān III: first, the caliph's interest in allying himself with the ascendant Saxon ruler; second, the resolution of their disagreement about epistolary etiquette; and third, negotiations concerning Muslim pirates, likely those active at Fraxinetum in the gulf of Saint-Tropez. Since surviving Arabic accounts of Ottonian embassies to Córdoba merely mention the dates of these visits and do not say anything about their purposes, we do not have a clear point of comparison for the *Vita*'s claims. The allegation that 'Abd al-Raḥmān initiated contact with Otto because he was so impressed by the king's victories is similar to boasts made by the late tenth-century Ottonian propagandist Widukind of Corvey and the eleventh-century Córdoba historian Ibn Ḥayyān, who asserted that Otto's and 'Abd al-Raḥmān's renown attracted embassies from all directions.⁵ While it may reflect the truth, such claims are a trope that does not reveal what the emissaries were sent to discuss or achieve.

Otto's stated need to make some sort of pact concerning the "Saracen" brigands, presumably those at Fraxinetum, is a convincing explanation for his negotiation with 'Abd al-Raḥmān. The caliph seems to have held some authority over that colony, described in ninth- and tenth-century Latin sources as a corsairs'

⁴ John of Saint-Arnould, *Vita Iohannis*, chap. 130.

⁵ Widukind of Corvey, *Rerum gestarum Saxoniarum libri tres*, 3:56; al-Maqqarī, *Nafḥ al-ṭīb min ghuṣṣ al-Andalus al-raṭīb*, 1:343.

nest whose residents were a constant menace to trade and travel across the Alps, and he had negotiated a deal for safe passage around Fraxinetum by some Frankish counts in 940.⁶ We can only speculate why ‘Abd al-Raḥmān would have initiated contact, but he may have sought to establish or strengthen long-distance trade routes through Otto’s realm for transporting Slavic slaves (*Ṣaḡālība*) to al-Andalus.⁷ A potential alliance against Sicily, whose Kalbid emirs had resumed raids into mainland Italy in the 950s, might also have been in ‘Abd al-Raḥmān and/or Otto’s sights.⁸ However, the *Vita* does not mention this.

The matter of the supposedly insulting or blasphemous letters sent between Otto and ‘Abd al-Raḥmān was not, most likely, a main motivator for contact; however, the text represents the emperor and caliph as mimicking standards of communication used between the Abbasids and Byzantines. The embedding of doctrinal quips in letters appears to have been a strategy for caliphs and emperors to assert the superiority of the religion undergirding each power while maintaining productive diplomatic relationships.⁹ That ‘Abd al-Raḥmān and Otto are said to have the practice with each other hints that they might have considered themselves better contenders for continuing the special twin imperial relationship of the Sasanians and Romans, on which the Byzantines modelled their relationship with the Abbasids.¹⁰

By the time of the *Vita*’s composition, the political situation that had produced John’s mission had changed considerably. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān had died in 961, succeeded as caliph by his son al-Ḥakam II; and Otto, who had been crowned emperor in 962, had been succeeded by his son Otto II in 973. That same year, an army led by William I of Provence destroyed Fraxinetum in retaliation for the capture of Maiolus, the abbot of Cluny. With these important fixtures gone from the scene, the *Vita*, a product of the 970s, was written in a different political context than the one John had inhabited as an emissary in the 950s. The contents of the letters exchanged by the caliph and emperor, which the hagiographer likely did not

6 John of Saint-Arnould, *Vita Iohannis*, chap. 130; Liudprand of Cremona, *Antapodosis*, 1:2; Ibn Ḥayyān, *Crónica del califa*, chap. 308. For a recent summary of the scholarship on Fraxinetum and a discussion of its legacy in Latin sources, see Bruce, *Cluny and the Muslims*.

7 I am indebted to Eduardo Manzano Moreno for this suggestion. On the likely participation of slave traders in John and Recemundus’ missions, see Drocourt, “Al-Andalus,” 66–68; on the slave trade see Jankowiak, “What Does the Slave Trade Tell Us?”

8 John of Saint-Arnould, *Hystoria*, 46n93; Sénac, “Contribution,” 51; Metcalfe, *Muslims of Medieval Italy*, 48–55.

9 Canard, “Le cérémonial fatimide,” 172–73; Mundhir ibn Sa‘īd al-Ballūṭī, “al-Risāla al-thāniya,” 147; Fierro, “Mundhir ibn Sa‘īd al-Ballūṭī.”

10 Walther, “Der gescheiterte Dialog,” 23.

know, is less important for understanding this context than the terminology and literary tropes used to describe them, and the circumstances of their exchanges. The account of John's and Recemundus' visits, and the brief mentions of embassies by later Arabic historians,¹¹ underrepresent the extent of communication between the caliphate and empire, which is more fully revealed in the *Vita's* employment of motifs derived from Arabic sources.

John's *Vita* represents his obstinate behaviour in Córdoba as an example of his saintly refutation of worldly temptations. However, underneath this Christian veneer lies a different trope: that of the clever and persistent ambassador, which appears in various Arabic sources describing diplomatic exchanges with the Byzantines. For example, Ibn Ḥayyān's account of Yahyā ibn al-Ḥakam al-Bakrī, the poet "al-Ghazal," and his embassy to the court of the emperor Theophilus in 225/840 is reminiscent of John's visit. Al-Ghazal earned the emperor's respect by persistently testing established protocol: when the emperor had an unusually low doorway built at the entrance to his chamber, so that visiting envoys would have to bow to him on their way in, al-Ghazal asserted his own dominance by making his way backwards through the doorway and greeting the emperor with his posterior.¹² Such anecdotes are clearly travelling motifs, for this same backwards prostration trick appears in a later account of al-Ghazal's visit to a Viking king,¹³ as well as an account of an Abbasid embassy to Constantinople led by al-Bāqillānī in 371/981.¹⁴ It also appears in a sixteenth-century Italian version of the *Dialogue of Solomon and Marcolf*, which has prompted speculation that a tenth-century Latin version of the text served as the source for the Arabic tale, though such a Latin version has not come down to us.¹⁵ These anecdotes generally end with the emperor rewarding the envoy for his cleverness and boldness.

The *Vita's* account of John's insistence on wearing his habit to meet 'Abd al-Raḥmān also makes better sense when read within this literary tradition than as a traditional hagiographic scene. A typical villain in a saint's *vita* would become enraged by such an act of defiance and rejection of worldly temptation—and indeed, this is how 'Abd al-Raḥmān's character reacts in a tenth-century Córdoba *vita* when his Christian captive Pelagius defiantly strips himself of his luxurious

11 Ibn 'Idhārī, *Kitāb al-bayān al-mughrib*, 2:218; Ibn Khaldūn, *Kitāb al-ībar*, 4.2.310.

12 Ibn Ḥayyān, *Crónica de los emires*, 238–39; Lévi-Provençal, "Un échange d'ambassades," 11.

13 Allen, *The Poet*, 20–21. On the possibility that this thirteenth-century description of al-Ghazal's visit to the Viking court is a corruption of the account of his visit to Constantinople, see Lévi-Provençal, "Un échange d'ambassades," 16; and Christys, *Vikings in the South*, 25–27.

14 Beihammer, "Die Kraft der Zeichen," 178.

15 Signes Codoñer, "Diplomatie und Propaganda," 385–88.

clothing in an evocation of St. Thecla.¹⁶ In John's *Vita*, the caliph expresses admiration for John's tenacious spirit and says he would be happy to receive the monk, even if he came dressed in a sack.¹⁷ As with the envoys from Córdoba, Baghdād, and Constantinople described in Arabic texts, John here passes an important test and manages to impress his host, thus asserting a dominant position on behalf of the ruler who sent him. In describing John's behaviour according to an international diplomatic trope, the *Vita* positions him and Otto as worthy participants in an inter-imperial dialogue. At the same time, the caliph displays *ḥilm*, the patience and forbearance demonstrated by a powerful ruler toward a subservient or conquered individual. It is unclear whether the hagiographer understood the full significance of this motif in Arabic panegyric (*madīḥ*). But in my opinion, it is likelier that he adapted the motif from a source originally written in Arabic and applied it to the caliph to present him in a positive light without intentionally reproducing the implication of subservience for John, the object of his forbearance.

The following passage in the *Vita*, which describes the procession leading John to the palace and into 'Abd al-Raḥmān's reception area, is even more overtly similar to Arabic embassy accounts, as will be demonstrated below.

On the day that had been agreed on for John's presentation at court, all the elaborate preparations for displaying royal splendour were made. Rows of men crowded the whole way from the lodging to the centre of the city, and from there to the palace. Here stood foot soldiers with their spears on the ground, and others brandishing javelins and spears, pretending to strike one another; after them, others mounted on mules with their light armour; then horsemen urging their steeds on with spurs and shouts, to make them rear up. In this startling way the Moors hoped to put fear into our people by their various martial displays, so strange to our eyes. John and his companions were led to the palace along a very dusty road, which the very dryness of the season alone served to stir up (for it was the summer solstice). High officials came forward to meet them, and all the pavement of the outer area of the palace was carpeted with most costly rugs and coverings. When John arrived at the dais where the king was seated alone almost like a godhead accessible to none or to very few, he saw everything draped with rare coverings, and floor-tiles stretched evenly to the walls. The king himself reclined upon a most richly ornate couch [...] As John came into his presence, the king stretched out a hand to be kissed

¹⁶ Raguel, *Uita uel passio*, chap. 8.

¹⁷ John of Saint-Arnould, *Vita Iohannis*, chap. 131.

[...] Then the king signed to John to be seated. A lengthy silence ensued on both sides. Then the king began: "I know your heart has long been hostile to me, and that is why I refused you an audience till now. You yourself know that I could not do otherwise. I appreciate your steadfastness and your learning [...]" John—who, as he later told us, had expected to utter something harsh to the king, since he had long harboured such resentment—suddenly became very calm and could never have felt more equitable in spirit [...] He had dismissed these things completely from his mind, and was only glad that he had won such generosity and favour, and that in this matter he had perceived such strength of purpose and moderation in the royal heart, and a most noble character [...] The king was greatly pleased with these remarks, and addressed John on other subjects. Then he asked him to hand over the presents from the emperor. When this was done, John instantly requested permission to leave.¹⁸

Narrative descriptions like this, of an envoy's arrival at a foreign court, appear in various Arabic *adab* texts from about the tenth century. Rather than relying on *isnāds* (chains of authority attesting historical authenticity), *adab* is characterized

18 John of Saint-Arnould, *Vita Iohannis*, chaps. 132–34; translation adapted from Smith, *Christians and Moors*, 1:71–73. "Post hec die prefixa qua presentandus [erat] [a]pparitus omni genere exquisitus ad pompam regiam demonstrandam conseritur. Viam totam [ab h] ospitio ipsorum usque ad civitatem et [inde] usque ad palatium varii hinc [inde] ordines constipabant; hic pedites hastis humo stantes defixis, longe inde [hast]ilia quaedam et missilia vibrantes manuque crispantes ictusque mutuos simu[la]ntes; post hos mulis quidam cum levi quadam armature insidentes deinde equites cal[ca]ribus equos in fremitu et subsultatione varia concitantes, Mauri preterea forma insolita nostros exterrentes. Ita variis proludiis, quae nostris miraculo arbitrabantur, itinere nimium pulverulento, quem per se ipsa quoque temporis siccitas—nam solstitium [er]at aestivum—sola concitaret, ad palatium perducuntur. Obvii proceres quique procedunt, [in ip]so limine exterior pavementum omne tapetibus pretiosissimis aut palliis stratum [er]at. Ubi ad cubiculum, quo rex solitarius quasi numen quoddam nullis aut raris [ac]cessibile residebat, perventum est, undique insolitis cuncta velaminibus obtec[ta] aequa parietibus pavimenta reddebant. Rex ipse thoro luxu quam poterat [magni]fico accumbebat [...] Ut igitur Iohannes coram advenit, manum interne osculamdam protendit [...] Inde sella parata manu ut sedeat, innuit. Longa deinde utriusque [sile]ntia. Tunc rex prior: 'Tuum, inquit, cor mihi plurimum diu cognosco fuisse infensum, [quamdiu] te demum aspect meo suspendi. Sed tu ipse penitus nosti, quod aliter fieri non potuit. Tuam virtutem sapientiam expertus sum ...' Iohannes ad haec, qui, sicut nobis [postea] referebat, aliquid fellis tam diutino angore contracti in regem evomere cogi[tabat], tam placidus repente effectus est, ut nihil animo ipsius umquam aequabilius esse [po]tuisset [...] unde si qua ea essent, se penitus animo depulsiisse, gratiae tantum, quam tam clementi magnificentia obtulisset, gratulari, et quod regii pectoris in hoc et robur constantiae et moderationis mediae pervidisset temperamentum satis egregium. Rege his in multam gratiam delinito pluribusque eum compellendi parante, munera imperialia primum excipi postulavit. Quo facto redditus indulgentiam e vestigio obsecravit."

by an anecdotal use of *akhbār* (reports about past events) that entertain as well as guide and edify. *Adab* often takes the form of manuals for exemplary government or judicial practice, but can also be more broadly applied as a historical methodology.¹⁹ Most surviving Arabic descriptions of the arrival of ambassadors belong to this genre²⁰ and offer practical models for the protocols required when receiving foreign diplomats while also showing off the ruler's financial, military, and political strength. They can be challenging to untangle as historical sources because they simultaneously preserve formulas of both ceremonial practice and its literary representation.

For example, the chronicle of Sibṭ ibn al-Jawzī (d. 654/1256) recounts two descriptions of a Byzantine delegation from Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus to the Abbasid caliph al-Muqtadir in 305/917–918. In the version attributed to Thābit b. Sinān (d. 365/976), a pair of envoys arrives bearing gifts and a letter, and is given comfortable lodgings. They ask their hosts about meeting the caliph and are told to inquire with the vizier, who plans a lavish reception for them. They are amazed at his display of luxurious carpets and draperies and the eunuchs and soldiers he has lined up according to rank. Through an interpreter, they discuss an exchange of prisoners, and the vizier agrees to petition the caliph on their behalf. When they visit al-Muqtadir, he has filled the palace with troops and carpets and is seated on a throne with the vizier Ibn al-Furāt, eunuchs, and various dignitaries standing on either side. The envoys kiss the ground before the caliph, hand their letter to the vizier, and then leave; after which al-Muqtadir gives them gifts and makes arrangements for their requested prisoner exchange. Sibṭ ibn al-Jawzī contrasts this with a version attributed to al-Ṣūlī (d. ca. 335/947), which describes the pomp in more detail. The caliph has one hundred and sixty thousand soldiers, seven thousand eunuchs, and six hundred chamberlains lined up from the Shammāsiyya gate to his palace, and various boats displayed along the Tigris. When the envoys pass the house of a chamberlain with thirty-eight thousand brocade hangings, twenty-two thousand carpets, and tamed exotic animals on display, they are so impressed that they think it is the caliph's palace. They visit another palace with a multicoloured tree covered in gold and silver whistling birds, then a final palace where they pass through more displays of carpets and weapons before arriving in front of al-Muqtadir. He sits on an ebony throne adorned with precious metals and stones while Ibn al-Furāt and an interpreter stand and talk with the envoys. They leave and are given gifts of clothing and money, and al-Muqtadir has one of his men arrange the prisoner exchange.²¹

¹⁹ Khalidi, *Arabic Historical Thought*, 113–30.

²⁰ Christys, "The Queen of the Franks," 159–61.

²¹ Sibṭ ibn al-Jawzī, *Mir'at al-zamān fī tārikh al-a'yān*, British Library, MS Or. 4619, vol. 2, fols. 65v–66v; French translation excerpted by Canard in Vasiliev, ed., *Byzance et les Arabes*, 2:169–71.

There is a third account of this embassy in Hilāl al-Šābī's (d. 448/1056) *Rusum dār al-Khilāfa*, which is largely the same as al-Šūlī's version, though less detailed. A single envoy and his retinue proceed from the Shammāsiyya gate to the palace between rows of troops, this time mounted on richly saddled horses and displaying a variety of weapons. The city is packed with onlookers, and a splendid array of boats adorns the Tigris. In this account, the envoy first visits the house of the chamberlain Naṣr al-Qushūrī, then that of the vizier Ibn al-Furāt, and mistakes each of them for the caliph. The prolonged practice of petitioning various dignitaries for an audience with the caliph, as seen in Thābit b. Sinān's account as well as in the *Vita Iohannis*, has been condensed and recast in al-Šūlī's and Hilāl al-Šābī's accounts as part of a single elaborate procession to the caliphal palace and a demonstration of the caliph's ability to dumbfound his imperial visitors. Hilāl al-Šābī says little about the envoy's actual meeting with al-Muqtadir: he pays his respects, is overcome with awe, then returns to his lodgings.²²

Al-Šābī's *Rusum dār al-Khilāfa* also contains another description of a Byzantine embassy to Baghdād, this time to the Buyid emir Šamšām al-Dawla in 376/986, which follows the same formula. It is less sensational—we may assume it is steeped in less lore, since Hilāl al-Šābī says he witnessed the event personally—but it still describes a meticulous and awe-inspiring arrangement of soldiers in rows, weaponry, draperies, and well-attired servants. The envoy greets the emir with a bow and kiss on the hand, is given a cushioned chair, converses with him via a translator, then departs.²³

All of these Arabic accounts share a general narrative structure marked by common details, such as an initial naming of the urban locations (gates and palaces) through which the envoy is led, the presence of rows of soldiers displaying their arms, and astonishment at the finery displayed by the caliph's retinue and servants, followed by the revealing of the caliph, a brief discussion, gift giving, and the envoy's exit.²⁴ While it might reflect actual ceremonial protocol for receiving envoys, it was clearly a literary trope recalling the splendour of the Abbasid caliphate.

Apart from the *Vita Iohannis*, there is only one other tenth-century Latin source that employs this trope. An anonymous chronicle written in Salerno, in or after 974, describes the unusual reception of an ambassador sent by Charlemagne to Arechis II, Prince of Salerno (r. 774–787), in 786. Here, the sequence of events is similar, but the passage presents the perspective of Arechis who, unlike the non-chalant caliphs of the Arabic versions, is anxious to make a good impression.²⁵ The

²² Hilāl al-Šābī, *Rusum dār al-khilāfa*, 16–18, 1:13–16.

²³ Hilāl al-Šābī, *Rusum dār al-khilāfa*, 18–20, 1:16–18.

²⁴ de la Granja, "A propósito."

²⁵ The episode refers to and expands upon one from Paul the Deacon, *Historia Langobardum* 5:21. There, King Grimoald of the Lombards (r. 662–671) deceives an Avar envoy into

chronicle first reports Arechis' preparations, then describes the visitors' reactions as they pass through the display. Awaiting them are soldiers wielding various weapons, adolescents holding sparrowhawks positioned along the palace steps, youths holding hawks and, finally, Arechis himself, seated on a golden throne and surrounded by distinguished old men. Arechis sends his leading men out to greet the visitors, with the expectation that they will be confused, wondering at each step whether they have arrived in his presence. When they finally reach him, they prostrate themselves before his sceptre and exclaim their amazement at what they have seen. The scene ends with a generous banquet.²⁶ This example shows a contemporary of John's hagiographer making playful use of the same Arabic literary trope that appears in the *Vita*, but in a Mediterranean context, rather than a north-western European one.

Lastly, *Muḥāḍarat al-abrār*, a work of *adab* by the renowned Andalusī scholar of the Almoravid period, Ibn al-ʿArabī, includes another similar description tucked in among legal and political snippets from the early thirteenth century. This passage, uniquely, identifies the embassy as coming from "the Franks"²⁷ to visit ʿAbd al-Raḥmān III in Córdoba. Of all the Arabic embassy accounts cited here, it bears the closest resemblance to the *Vita*'s account of John's visit.

One day (*yawmā*) envoys from the Franks came to this caliph, and his kingdom appeared so mighty to them that it made them covetous (*wa-qad ṣahara lahum min ʿazīm al-mulk mā yurghabahum*). A myriad [of carpets] was spread out for them a parasang long (*qadr farsakh*) from the Gate of Córdoba to the Gate of [Madinat] al-Zahra' (*min bāb Qurṭuba ilā bāb al-Zahrāʾ*), and men were put on the right and left side of the path with swords in their hands, long and wide, with the swords on the right and left put together to form a curved arch, which the envoys were made to walk through under their shadow, like an arcade (*wa-juʿila al-rijāl ʿan yamīn al-ṭariq, wa-yasārahu, bi-ʿaydihum al-suyūf, al-ṭawāl, al-ʿarāq, mujarrada, yujmʿa bayn sayf al-yamīn, wa-sayf al-aysar, haq ṣārat kaʿaqd al-ḥināyā, wa-amara bi-l-arsāl ān yamshū bayna tilka fī ṣalāliha kaʿannahā sabbāt*). And only God knows the terror they were filled with (*fadakhalahum min al-ruʿab mā lā yaʿlamuhu ilā Allah taʿālā*). When they arrived at the Gate of al-Zahra'

thinking he has a large army by getting his soldiers to parade around his lodgings in multiple changes of clothes.

26 *Chronicon Salernitanum*, chap. 12.

27 "Franks" (*al-Ifranja*) was a general term used for Catalans and people dwelling beyond the Pyrenees; see König, *Arabic-Islamic Views*, 211–21. See Smarandache, "Re-examining," on the linguistic implications of this term.

there was silk brocade spread out for them from the door of the city to his seat, with the same intimidating effect. He had set up chamberlains in specific positions as though they were kings, seated on ornamental chairs and wearing brocade and silk. When they saw the chamberlains they bowed down before them, assuming that one was the caliph, and the chamberlains said to them, "Lift up your heads, this is one of his many slaves." Then they reached a plaza furnished with sand (*sāḥa mafrūsha bi-l-raml*), and the caliph was seated in the middle of it in shabby, short clothing worth less than four dirhams, sitting on the ground with his head bowed and a Qurʾān, a sword, and a fire before him. And it was said to the envoys: "This is the Sultan," so they bowed down to him, and he raised his head to them before they spoke and said: "God commanded that we summon you to this," and he pointed to the Qurʾān, the book of God, "and if you refuse, to this," he said as he pointed to the sword, "and your fate if we kill you, to this" he said as he pointed to the fire. And at this they were filled with terror and he ordered that they be escorted out, and although he had barely spoken they settled an agreement on his terms.²⁸

This passage has been read in conjunction with John's *Vita* before, in attempts to analyze its historicity and identify the characters and buildings it mentions.²⁹ But such prior comparisons assume that the similarities between the two passages merely result from the fact that they describe the same or a similar event. I contend that the passages are similar because they are based on the same literary tradition, and even a common Arabic source.

That John's hagiographer's sources included some material of Arabic provenance is supported by the appearance in the *Vita* of the first known Latin rendering of the idiom *bāʿa nafahu min Allah* (he sold his soul for God), attributed

²⁸ Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Kitāb muḥāḍarat al-abrār wa-musāmarat al-akhyār*, 2:454; my translation, with reference to that of de la Granja, "A propósito," 393–94.

ال خليفة يوماً ارسل الافرنج، وقد ظهر لهم من عظيم الملك، ما يرغبهم، بسط لهم الحصر من باب قرطبة، الى باب الزهراء، قدر فرسخ، وجعل الرجال عن يمين الطريق، ويساره، بأيديهم السيوف، الطوال، العراض، مجردة، بجمع بين سيف اليمين، وسيف الأيسر، حتى صارت كعقد الحنايا، وأمر بالارسل ان يمشوا بين تلك في ظلها، كأنها ساباط، فدخلهم من الربع ما لا يعلمه إلا الله تعالى، فلما وصوا الى باب الزهراء فرش لهم الديباج، من باب المدينة الى مقعده، على تلك الحالة من الترهيب، وأقام في مواضع مخصوصة حجاباً، كأنهم الملوك، فعوداً على كراسي مزخرفة، عليهم الديباج، والحريز، فما أبصروا حاجباً إلا سجدوا له يتخللون انه الخليفة، فيقال لهم: ارفعوا رؤوسكم، هذا عبد من عبيده، الى ان وصلوا به الى ساحة مفروشة بالرم، والخليفة في وسطها، قاعد، عليه ثياب خلق، قصار، يساوي كل ما عليه اربعة دراهم، وهو قاعد على الارض، مطروق، وبين يديه مصحف، وسيف، ونار. فقل للرسول: هذا السلطان، فسجدوا له، فرفع رأسه اليهم قبل ان يتكلموا وقال: ان الله أمرنا يا هؤلاء ان ندعوكم الى هذا، وأشار الى المصحف كتاب الله، فان أبيتم فهذا، وأشار الى السيف، ومصيركم اذا قتلناكم الى هذا، وأشار الى النار. فملنوا منه رعباً، وأمر بإخراجهم، ولم يبدو كلاماً، فصالحوه على ما أراد

²⁹ Walther, "Der gescheiterte Dialog," 37; John of Saint-Arnould, *Hystoria*, 63–64.

to Recemundus when he offers to bear a new letter to Otto from the caliph.³⁰ Additionally, when the hagiographer mentions John kissing the caliph's hand, he provides an explanation that reads like it came from an *adab* manual:

The kiss is hardly ever offered to any of his own people or foreigners; to minor and middling men he offers the outside of his hand to kiss, and to the outstanding members of his retinue he opens his palm to be kissed on the inside.³¹

Hilāl al-Ṣābīʾ provides a lengthier explanation of the circumstances under which this privilege is granted, and similarly divides his discussion among the general public, middle-ranked soldiers, lower dignitaries, and emirs and viziers.³² Perhaps John's hagiographer relied on an Andalusī handbook similar to *Rusum dār al-khilāfa*.

Reading the *Vita*'s account of John's initial meeting with ʿAbd al-Raḥmān as one based on a translation from an Arabic source written according to the literary formula for describing embassies will help to clarify the passage's unusual features and its contemporary significance. It is, of course, impossible for John's hagiographer to have relied on Ibn al-ʿArabī, since the latter was writing in the early thirteenth century; but John's *Vita* is clearly indebted to the same set of narrative details and Arabic topoi repeated in that later text.

Both accounts open with a reference to the appointed day of the visit (*yawmā; die prefixa*) and the impressive display prepared for the envoy (*wa-qad zahara lahum min ʿazīm al-mulk mā yurghabahum; [a]pparitus omni genere exquisitus ad pompam regiam demonstrandam conseritur*), then describe the soldiers and their arms on display stretching a long distance (*qadr farsakh; viam totam*) from Córdoba to the caliphal suburb of Madinat al-Zahra'.³³ In the *Vita*, an awkward

30 John of Saint-Arnould, *Vita Iohannis*, chap. 128: "dixit 'Quae erit merces viro qui vendi[derit vobis animam suam?].' Nam ita sollemne eis verbum ut, quotiens summon quoli[bet periculo in nuntium] quis destinatur, ita ei dicatur 'Vende mihi animam tuam.'" See Barceló, "The Earliest Sketch?," 251.

31 John of Saint-Arnould, *Vita Iohannis*, chap. 133. "Oscu[lo vixd]um ulli vel suorum vel extraneorum admisso, minoribus quibusque ac mediocribus man[um] foris, summis et, quos prestantiori excipit pompa, palmam mediam aperit [osc]ulandam." Jacobsen and Pertz transcribe this passage slightly differently.

32 Hilāl al-Ṣābīʾ, *Rusum dār al-khilāfa*, 29–30, 2:38–39.

33 Ibn al-ʿArabī says that they went "from the Gate of Córdoba to the Gate of al-Zahra'" (*min bāb Qurṭuba ilā bāb al-Zahrāʾ*); the *vita* says that the envoys went from their place of lodging to the centre of the city, then to the palace (*[ab h]ospitio ipsorum usque ad civitatem et [inde] usque ad palatium*), which El-Hajji, *Andalusian Diplomatic Relations*, 223 notes, implies that the palace they visited was outside Córdoba.

description of some foot soldiers resting their spears on the ground while others pretend to strike one another with their weapons³⁴ stands in the place where Ibn al-ʿArabī explains how the rows of soldiers used their weapons to form an arcade under which the envoys had to walk.³⁵ Each display terrifies the envoys.³⁶ The *Vita*'s martial performance makes better sense when read as a muddled translation of an Arabic description of soldiers forming an arcade, as in Ibn al-ʿArabī's account.

The next couple of sentences in each account do not line up exactly, but they consist of three key shared elements. Ibn al-ʿArabī states that brocades were spread on the ground from the door of the city to the palace, that the envoys mistook the caliph's exquisitely dressed chamberlains for their master, and that finally they reached a sandy plaza. In the *Vita*, the envoys travel along a dusty road dried out by the heat, until high officials come out to meet them outside the palace, where the ground is covered in costly textiles. The details appear in a different order, and the detail about the envoys mistaking slaves for the caliph is missing. Such a detail would have been embarrassing to both John and Otto, and if it was present in an earlier version of the Arabic account it was not reproduced in the *Vita*. Hence, there is only a passing mention of officials coming out to greet the envoys. The dusty road, explained bemusedly with a reference to the summer solstice, contradicts the point about the road being covered in carpets and is likely the product of a mistranslation of the sandy plaza (*sāḥa mafrūsha bi-l-raml*). So far, the two accounts are extremely similar.

At this point, the accounts begin to diverge significantly, though they maintain a generally parallel narrative structure. In both cases, the envoys see the caliph sitting in the reception area. In the *Vita*, he is alone and looks like an inaccessible deity; Ibn al-ʿArabī does not specify that he is alone, but also does not mention anyone seated near him. This is unusual, because other accounts of audiences with ʿAbd al-Raḥmān explain in detail how specific heirs and dignitaries flanked him when he received visitors.³⁷ In Ibn al-ʿArabī's account, the caliph commands respect through his striking humility rather than extravagant display, a feature

34 John of Saint-Arnould, *Vita Iohannis*, chap. 132: "hic pedites hastis humo stantes defixis, longe inde [hast]ilia quaedam et missilia vibrantes manuque crispantes ictusque mutuos simu[la]ntes."

35 Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Kitāb muḥāḍarat al-abrār wa-musāmarat al-akhyār*, 2:454: "wa-ju'ila al-rijāl ʿan yamīn al-ṭarīq, wa-yasārahu, bi-ʿaydīhum al-suyūf, al-ṭawāl, al-ʿarāḍ, mujarrada, yujmʿa bayn sayf al-yamīn, wa-sayf al-aysar, haq šārat ka-ʿaqd al-ḥināyā, wa-amara bi-l-arsāl ān yamshū bayna tilka fi ḡalāliha kaʿannaha sabbāt."

36 Ibn al-ʿArabī, 2:454: "fadakhalahum min al-ruʿab mā lā yaʿlamuhu ilā Allah taʿālā; Mauri preterea forma insolita nostros exterrentes."

37 Cutler, "Constantinople and Cordoba," 421.

that likely betrays the Sufi philosopher's sensibilities rather than the caliph's historical ones. Next, the *Vita* describes 'Abd al-Raḥmān as surrounded by finery and sitting on a magnificent dais, whereas for Ibn al-'Arabī he is wearing worthless clothing and seated on the ground. In the *Vita*, he extends his hand for the envoy to kiss, and in Ibn al-'Arabī's account he raises his head to his bowing visitors. 'Abd al-Raḥmān speaks first in both accounts and receives what his guests bring (gifts in the *Vita*; an agreement on his terms in Ibn al-'Arabī), and then the envoys leave abruptly. In the *Vita*, John and 'Abd al-Raḥmān resume their conversation in a separate meeting on another occasion.

In the two accounts compared here, the content and tone of the conversations are starkly different, however the action proceeds according to the same pattern. While we cannot know exactly how the account in John's *Vita* compares to the original source, and so cannot pinpoint where his hagiographer might have applied creative licence, that he used a source of Arabic provenance describing Umayyad court ceremonial to illustrate John's saintliness and Otto's power is significant in itself. It indicates a much more familiar relationship between the Umayyad and Ottonian realms than has previously been recognized. The *Vita*'s description of John's visit to Córdoba highlights Otto I's and, by extension, Otto II's power and prestige as a ruler who participated in diplomacy on an imperial scale. Moreover, the *Vita* twice accuses Otto I's younger son, Liudulf of Swabia, and his son's ally, Conrad of Lotharingia, of opening the realm to Magyar invasion by rebelling against Otto I. The caliph himself voices this criticism of Otto's fragile authority, accusing him of granting his subjects excessive local autonomy.³⁸

Janet Nelson has argued that the *Vita* places this criticism in the caliph's mouth to contrast their styles of rule and to imply that the famous battle of Lechfeld, at which Otto had defeated the Magyars in 955 and solidified his power, proved the superiority of his more devolved style.³⁹ However, Lechfeld had not banished dissent from the realm. Otto II faced another spate of rebellions in the 970s. One consumed the Duchy of Lotharingia, where the monks of Gorze sided with their patron the emperor against the rebels and King Lothar of France. So the unrest described in the *Vita* did not dredge up the concerns of a bygone era; rather, it reflected the ongoing political turmoil in which John's hagiographer was enmeshed while writing. 'Abd al-Raḥmān's criticism can thus be read as voicing the monks' frustration with Otto's disloyal clients.⁴⁰ Writing in Lotharingia amid more rebellion, John's hagiographer employed the dialogue between John and the caliph to

³⁸ John of Saint-Arnould, *Vita Iohannis*, chap. 67, 136.

³⁹ Nelson, "Rulers and Government," 127.

⁴⁰ Barone, "Jean de Gorze," 37; Parisse, "Introduction," 23.

highlight the danger of local dissension in Lotharingia and to implore Otto II to be more authoritative than his father had been. In portraying Otto I as an equal to ‘Abd al-Raḥmān, he was making it clear that the Ottonian family, not Lothar of France, were the heirs to Christian empire in the West.

Conclusion

The *Life of John of Gorze* addresses the interrelated problems of local rebellion in Lotharingia, wider turmoil throughout Otto II’s empire, and competition with the neighbouring kingdom of France—all through the lens of John’s mission to Córdoba approximately two decades earlier. It reaches beyond the assumed confines of Latinate Christian Europe not only in its choice of subject matter, but also in its surprising use of motifs and material from Arabic *adab* and *madiḥ* literature, in combination with Christian hagiographic tropes. Through the mixture of these literary traditions, ‘Abd al-Raḥmān appears as both an opponent and a wise foreign ruler propping up Ottonian claims to international importance through his respect for John and interest in Otto’s kingdom. Likewise, John is simultaneously the vexed underdog of hagiography and a skilful imperial diplomat in the Byzantine mould. Indeed, he surpasses the example of the Byzantine envoy in *adab* anecdotes by flipping the script and ensuring that the caliph is the one left impressed by their meeting. Assuming that Ibn al-‘Arabi’s account faithfully reproduces the source used by the hagiographer, John also usurps ‘Abd al-Raḥmān’s expected role by appearing in a habit instead of the expensive clothing becoming of an ambassador. Our author has folded *adab* into hagiography and in so doing revealed the wider significance of John’s mission. The Ottonians’ interest in the Mediterranean was not limited to Italy or a desire to repel the pirates of Fraxinetum. They were aware of and involved in Andalusī politics and used Arabic literature to portray themselves as imperial actors on an international stage.

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Abstract The *Life of John of Gorze* tells the story of a monk who served as an envoy from Otto I to ‘Abd al-Raḥmān III in the 950s. It reflects the turbulent political context in which it was written during the 970s and fits into the imperial program initiated by Emperor Otto I nearly a decade after John’s mission. The text’s engagement with Arabic literary motifs positions John and the Ottonian emperors as significant figures in Mediterranean politics and reveals the Latin author’s knowledge of these Arabic sources.

Keywords: John of Gorze, Otto I, diplomacy, hagiography, adab, al-Andalus, Umayyad caliphate, Holy Roman Empire

THE WRITING OF *MUNĀẒARĀT* IN TIMES OF TURMOIL: DISPUTATIONS IN FATIMID IFRĪQIYA¹

ASLISHO QURBONIEV*

THIS CHAPTER CONTEXTUALIZES two accounts of disputations (*munāẓarāt*) from the early Fatimid period in North Africa (909–969) and their subsequent inclusion in biographical literature. Far from being objective accounts of polemical exchanges—as they are often treated in modern scholarship—these narratives reflect the uncertainties of their authors during a particular time of religious and political turmoil within the Muslim Mediterranean. Moreover, in their attempts to advance their own status through these writings, these authors made broader claims for the factions with which they were affiliated, in order to crystallize and legitimize competing political and religious identities.

The first and best known is an account of disputations between the local Mālikī scholar Saʿīd ibn al-Ḥaddād (d. 915) and the newly arrived Fatimid *dāʿī* (agent or missionary, literally “summoner”) Abū-l-ʿAbbās (d. 911). However, the earliest version of al-Ḥaddād’s narrative is preserved in the Mālikī biographical dictionary of Muḥammad b. Ḥārith al-Khushanī (d. ca. 981), completed many years later in al-Andalus and apparently at the request of his patron, the Umayyad crown prince al-Ḥakam II (r. 961–976).² The second is an account by the Fatimid *dāʿī* Ibn al-Haytham (d. after 953) of disputations and discussions with the above-mentioned *dāʿī* Abū-l-ʿAbbās and his brother, the revolutionary leader Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Shīʿī (d. 911), both of whom were subsequently executed for treason. This account, too, is temporally distant from the events it describes, since al-Haytham wrote it down almost forty years later, during the final year of a rebellion (943–947) which almost toppled the Fatimids. I accordingly place these disputations and their documentation in the wider context of inter-Islamic political and religious rivalries: among the Fatimids of al-Mahdiyya, the Umayyads of Córdoba, and the

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¹ Ifrīqiya—the old Roman province of Africa (eastern Algeria, Tunisia, and Tripolitania).

² al-Khushanī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 199–210; later versions in al-Mālikī, *Riyāḍ*, 2:57–115; and ʿIyāḍ, *Madārik*, 351–63.

Abbasids of Baghdād (on the one hand) and within the ideologically charged controversies over logic and philosophy (on the other).

The major historical event that marks the starting point for this essay is the revolution of 909, which ended the Aghlabid emirate (800–909) in Ifrīqiya and brought the Shīʿī Fatimid dynasty (909–1171) to power.³ The emirate had been a vassal state of the Abbasid caliphs of Baghdād, while the Fatimids emerged from a clandestine network of anti-Abbasid missionaries who were Ismāʿīlī Shīʿīs: committed to upholding the religious and political authority of the imams from the lineage of the Prophet Muḥammad through his daughter Fāṭima and his cousin and son-in-law ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib. ʿAlī was considered the only legitimate successor to the Prophet by his supporters, who became known as “the party of ʿAlī” (*shīʿat ʿAlī*), or Shīʿa. Abū ʿAbd Allāh, the leader of the Fatimid revolution, was even known as al-Shīʿī (“the Shīʿī”). He rallied the Kutāma Berbers of Kabyliya region (northern Algeria) in the name of a messianic figure, ʿAbd Allāh al-Mahdī (r. 909–934), who was rescued from imprisonment in Sijilmāsa (southern Morocco) and installed as the first Fatimid imam-caliph.

The disputations central to my argument took place immediately following Abū ʿAbd Allāh’s conquest of the last Aghlabid stronghold at Qayrawān (Kairouan, Tunisia) but before the enthronement of al-Mahdī in January 910. During this period, Abū-l-ʿAbbās, brother of the revolutionary leader, acted as the interim ruler of Ifrīqiya and challenged the local scholars, the majority of whom followed the Mālikī and Ḥanafī schools of law (*madhhab*), to religious debates.⁴ Both of our authors, one Mālikī and one Shīʿī, had therefore witnessed these turbulent events. Ibn al-Ḥaddād may have written his account not long after the disputations took place, presumably before Abū-l-ʿAbbās and his brother were charged with treason and executed by al-Mahdī one year after his enthronement. Perhaps for this very reason, the brothers’ fellow *dāʿī* Ibn al-Haytham did not write about his association with them until many years later, during another turbulent time: the rebellion of Abū Yazīd al-Nukkārī⁵ (d. 947), who led an uprising of Ibāḍī Berbers against the Fatimids in 943 and captured most of the Fatimid territories, including Qayrawān, before his forces were defeated in 946. After recapturing Qayrawān, the crown prince Abū Ṭāhir Ismāʿīl (crowned as al-Manṣūr bi-llāh) pardoned the Mālikī scholars and all those who had sided with the rebels. In addition, he gave them considerable religious freedoms, which was seen as a reversal of his predecessors’ policy.

³ For the most recent and accessible history of the Fatimids, see Brett, *The Fatimid Empire*.

⁴ The Mālikīs were also known as the Medinese (*al-Madaniyyūn*, *ahl al-Madina*) after the home city of the school’s eponymous founder, Mālik ibn Anas (d. 795). Likewise, the Ḥanafīs were called the ʿIrāqīs (*al-ʿIrāqiyyūn* or *ahl al-ʿIrāq*) because of the ʿIrāqī origin of their eponymous founder Abū Ḥanīfa (d. 767).

⁵ Stern, “Abū Yazīd”; Al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān, *Iftitāh*, 231–32; Ibn ʿIdhārī, *al-Bayān*, 1:205, 228–32.

During this period, the Umayyads of Córdoba, the ideological rivals of the Fatimids, posed as the protectors of the Mālikīs and used their negative experiences under Shīʿī rule to discredit the Fatimids. At the height of this Umayyad—Fatimid rivalry, the circulation of Ibn al-Ḥaddād's *munāẓarāt* proved useful as part of the Umayyads' anti-Fatimid propaganda. Ibn al-Ḥaddād had already been included in Abū-l-ʿArab's *Kitāb al-Miḥan* (Book of Trials), where he was depicted as a victim of the purge under the pro-Abbasid Aghlabids; but it was al-Khushanī's biographical dictionary, produced for the Umayyads in al-Andalus, which made Ibn al-Ḥaddād's disputations famous.⁶ Al-Khushanī had studied with both Ibn al-Ḥaddād and Abū-l-ʿArab (d. 945) in Qayrawān, and it is probable that the polemical climate at the Córdoba court encouraged him to include a separate chapter on Mālikī polemicists, of whom Ibn al-Ḥaddād was by far the best representative due to his confrontation with the Fatimid *dāʿīs*. In his turn, the *dāʿī* al-Haytham may have responded to the rebellion and the restoration of Fatimid rule, in 947, by writing a memoir that glorified himself and his fellow disputants, including Abū-l-ʿAbbās and Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Shīʿī, whose memories could not have been celebrated after their execution in 911.

***Munāẓara* and the Traditionalists of Qayrawān**

The *munāẓara* (pl. *munāẓarāt*) was arguably the highest form of scholarly exchange in the premodern Islamic world, both the most formal and the most public. It was primarily a theological or juridical debate between prominent members of two opposing schools of thought (or religious doctrine)—like disputation between the Mālikī Ibn al-Ḥaddād and the Fatimid Abū-l-ʿAbbās—and often took place in the presence of a political authority.⁷ However, private discussions between like-minded scholars were also called *munāẓarāt*, which comes from the same root as the word *naẓar* (*n-ẓ-r*—نظر)—speculative reasoning—whose verbal form *nāẓara* (ناظر) indicates a dialogue or debate between two parties, such as that between the Fatimid *dāʿīs* and Ibn al-Haytham.⁸ In medieval Qayrawān, rationalist theologians (*ahl al-naẓar*) were the leading proponents of disputations because the permissibility of reason and logic was a matter of disagreement among traditionalists (*ahl al-sunna*), who avoided engaging in rational debates even within private circles.⁹ According to an amusing anecdote reported in the biography of Asad b. al-Furāt (d. 828), this traditionalist had physically assaulted Sulaymān al-Farrāʾ, “the head

⁶ Abū-l-ʿArab, *Miḥan*, 360; Pellat, “al-Khushanī,” IE2.

⁷ Wagner, “Munāẓara.”

⁸ Makdisi, *Rise of Colleges*, 110.

⁹ For a discussion of this term, see Melchert, *Formation*, 2–3.

of the Mu‘tazila [rationalist school] in Qayrawān,” and had thrown him out of his session (*majlis*) for raising a theological question.¹⁰ The biographers may have fabricated this anecdote in order to clear Asad from the accusation that he himself adhered to the Mu‘tazilī creed, which denied that the Qur’ān was uncreated and co-eternal with the divine.¹¹ Nonetheless, it captures the hostile attitude of Mālikī traditionalists to rational speculation, which had developed over generations.¹² The appointment of Saḥnūn b. Sa‘īd to the judgeship of Qayrawān (849–854) is often cited as a watershed event in this regard, because he reportedly banned rationalist circles from the Great Mosque and objected to their disputations.¹³ His son Muḥammad b. Saḥnūn (d. 869), although known for his disputations, also cautioned against debating with a more skilled opponent who could make a stronger case for his falsehood and so prevail over the truth.¹⁴

The study of philosophy and logic was equally controversial. Prior to the Fatimid takeover of Qayrawān, Ibn al-Haytham was almost deprived of his inheritance by the Mālikī judge Ḥimās¹⁵, for possessing books of Greek philosophy, as well as Shī‘ī books.¹⁶ The fact that Ibn al-Haytham had a Jewish teacher of logic named Yūsuf b. Yaḥyā al-Khurāsānī was also used against him in the court, in addition to accusations of his belief in the createdness of the Qur’ān and his Shī‘ī beliefs, such as the doctrine of *rafḍ*.¹⁷ Ibn Abī Zayd al-Qayrawānī (d. 998), the foremost Mālikī

¹⁰ Abū-l-‘Arab, *Ṭabaqāt*, 82; ‘Iyāḍ, *Madārik*, 63, 357. See also Talbi, “Theological Polemics,” 152. The eponymous authority of the Mālikī school, Mālik ibn Anas, is himself said to have discouraged religious debate and even asking questions; see Adang, “Controversies,” 289. See also Schacht, “Mālik b. Anas.”

¹¹ The story is related under the subheading “On the ranking of Asad in knowledge, virtue and *sunna*”: ‘Iyāḍ, *Madārik*, 62–64.

¹² Only later did they follow suit after Muslim philosophers and theologians put dialectics and disputations at the service of Islamic jurisprudence. On this see Makdisi, *Rise of Colleges*, 8, 107f; Stewart, “Introduction,” xxii.

¹³ ‘Iyāḍ, *Madārik*, 104.

¹⁴ Adang, “Controversies,” 300. As Adang observes, there is no reason to doubt whether the debate actually took place. More significant is to note that the biographical dictionaries portray him as a reluctant participant, as is the case with Ibn al-Ḥaddād.

¹⁵ Ḥimās b. Marwān, a student of Saḥnūn, who was appointed to the judgeship of Qayrawān in 903 but quitted the job in protest the same year (or in 907).

¹⁶ Ibn al-Haytham, *Munāẓarāt*, 73–74 (trans. 125–26).

¹⁷ For Ibn al-Haytham’s Jewish teacher, see *Munāẓarāt*, 60 (trans. 112). The createdness of the Qur’ān (*khalq al-Qur’ān*) was the creed of most ‘Irāqī (Ḥanafī) scholars with whom Ibn al-Haytham studied. The doctrine of *rafḍ*, denouncing the first two rightly guided caliphs Abū Bakr and ‘Umar, was apparently introduced to Ibn al-Haytham by one of his teachers, Muḥammad al-Kūfī, who came to Qayrawān from Sicily: see Ibn al-Haytham, *Munāẓarāt*, 112n78.

scholar in Fatimid Ifrīqiya, viewed both the culture of disputation and the Greek sciences as un-Islamic, for which he blamed the Abbasids of Baghdad.

When [the Greek books] reached [Yaḥyā b. Khalid, the Barmakid vizier of the ‘Abbāsids], he gathered all the philosophers and heretics [to study them]. One of the books that came out of this collection was the *Book of Logic*. Few people ever applied themselves to the study of this book and were saved from heresy (*zandaqa*). Then Yaḥyā established in his house disputations and dialectical argumentation on matters that should not [be discussed], and every adherent of a religion began to discuss his religion and raise objections against it, relying on himself [alone, i.e. disregarding revelation].¹⁸

According to Dimitri Gutas, the Mālikīs, as a pro-Umayyad group, opposed the Greek sciences and disputation mainly due to their association with “the hated ‘Abbāsids.” Moreover, he argues, the Abbasid inquisition of traditionist scholars, known as the *miḥna* (trial),¹⁹ played a major role in polarizing religious and rational sciences.²⁰

However, Ibn Abī Zayd’s denunciation of the Abbasids was not only an apologetic defence of the fallen Umayyad dynasty; the passage also reveals that he was concerned about methods of disputation that undermined the authority of transmitted religious knowledge at a time of formidable contemporary challenges to the Mālikī community, especially the traditionalists, under the Fatimids.²¹ Like the Abbasids of Baghdad, the Fatimids were open to both intra- and interreligious disputations. Both al-Manṣūr (r. 947–953) and al-Mu‘izz (r. 953–975), the Fatimid imam-caliphs who ruled during Ibn Abī Zayd’s lifetime, endorsed such

¹⁸ Quoted in al-Suyūṭī, *Sawn al-Manṭiq*, 7–8 (passage partially trans. by Gutas, *Greek Thought*, 157). This remark is probably from his *Kitāb al-Nahy ‘an al-Jadal*, which is apparently lost. His informant was apparently the Andalusian Abū ‘Umar Aḥmad b. Sa’dī (d. after 1018), who expressed shock and disapproval after attending two sessions of interreligious rational disputations in tenth-century Baghdad and related his experience to Ibn Abī Zayd. See Cook, “Ibn Sa’dī,” 169–78; Soffer, “Theological *Majlis*,” 219–35. Ibn Abī Zayd’s anti-rationalist stance is also clear from his *Kitāb al-Jāmi‘*, 47, 125.

¹⁹ The *miḥna*, usually rendered as “inquisition,” was a trial procedure which the Abbasid caliph al-Ma’mūn (d. 833) and two of his successors adopted (between 833 and 846) in order to impose the doctrine of the createdness of the Qur’ān on the scholars. See Hinds, “Miḥna”; Turner, *Inquisition*.

²⁰ Gutas, *Greek Thought*, 156–57, 161.

²¹ In fact, the contemporary Umayyads of Spain also “imitated” the ‘Abbāsids and the older Umayyad dynasty in importing the Greek sciences to al-Andalus: see al-Dhahabī, as quoted in al-Suyūṭī, *Sawn al-Manṭiq*, 12.

disputations. Al-Muʿizz even encouraged his followers to debate him during his audiences. Likewise, he organized disputations with followers of other faiths.²² That said, the Abbasid *miḥna* was significant in spurring passive resistance among the traditionalists of Ifrīqiya,²³ whose narratives of defiance, persecution, and perseverance bolstered their collective identity, as their promotion of Ibn al-Ḥaddād's disputations will show.

The culture of dialogue and dialectic, of course, existed among many different medieval religious communities, including the Jews and Christians of the Islamic world and Christian Europe, even before their first encounter with the Aristotelian tradition following the Abbasids' translation movement in the late eighth and ninth centuries.²⁴ Interreligious disputations were not rare, either, given the mobility of scholars among communities around the Mediterranean and beyond. In Walter E. Young's words, "if one feature above all others marks the intellectual landscape of the Near East in Late Antiquity and early Islam, it is dialectical debate."²⁵ It is in this intellectual climate that the debates discussed in this essay took place and were written down.²⁶

The Authors of Disputations and Their Audiences

Abū ʿUthmān Saʿīd b. Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥaddād al-Ghassānī (834–915) was a student of Saḥnūn b. Saʿīd and apparently one of the few Mālikīs who took an interest in disputations at the time. He lived all his life in Qayrawān and did not have the means to travel in pursuit of knowledge, except for a short visit to Tripoli (modern Libya).²⁷

²² Al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān, *Majālis*, 107: al-Manṣūr advised his son al-Muʿizz to question everything before accepting anything. See also Cohen and Somekh, "Interreligious *Majālis*," 128–36; Walker, "Fatimid Institutions," 181. To be sure, there were Mālikīs who were known for their disputations in *fiqh* and *kalām* (rational theology) even among the teachers of Ibn Abī Zayd al-Qayrawānī; yet the biographers are usually quick to point out that there was nothing controversial about their disputations: see, for instance, Ibn Abī Zayd, *al-Jāmiʿ*, 25–26.

²³ Gutas, *Greek Thought*, 161–63.

²⁴ Widigdo, "Aristotelian Dialectic," 9–10; Young, *Dialectical Forge*, 24; Stroumsa, "Early Muslim and Jewish *Kalām*," 202–23.

²⁵ Young, *Dialectical Forge*, 19–20.

²⁶ After Aristotelian dialectic was adopted by the cultures of these regions, it was put to use for polemical as well as didactic purposes until its institutionalization in the form of medieval scholastic disputation and Islamic juridical disputation (*jadal*). For this and for a comparative analysis of medieval scholastic disputation and *jadal*, see Widigdo, "Aristotelian Dialectic," 1–24. For scholastic disputation, see Novikoff, *Medieval Culture of Disputation*. For Islamic dialectical disputation theory, see Young, *Dialectical Forge*.

²⁷ For biographical entries on him, see al-Khushanī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 148–51; al-Mālikī, *Riyāḍ*, 2:57–115; ʿIyāḍ, *Madārik*, 351–63; al-Dabbāgh and Ibn Nājī, *Maʿālim*, 2:295–315.

According to al-Khushanī's biography of him, he was a prolific writer who authored books on rational theology, disputation, and jurisprudence, and was also an expert in Arabic grammar and in disputation—his main area of interest. A few fragments attributed to him survive in the manuscript collection of the Great Mosque of Qayrawān, and these generally confirm the information given in the biographical dictionaries (*tabaqāt*).²⁸ Ibn al-Ḥaddād became wealthy in old age after receiving an inheritance from one of his relatives, who passed away in Sicily. He was in his seventies when he took part in debates with the Fatimid *dā'īs* in 909, which raised his prestige among the Mālikīs.

His debate with Abū-l-'Abbās, as noted above, is initially preserved in al-Khushanī's *Tabaqāt*, in his "section on the traditionalists and other scholars in Qayrawān who adopted *naẓar* (rational speculations) and adorned themselves with *jadāl* (dialectics)." Divided into four sessions (*majālis*) of debate, it is the largest entry in the section and is quoted verbatim from the account written by Ibn al-Ḥaddād. This same account was later copied into other biographical dictionaries, such as the *Kitāb Riyāḍ al-Nufūs* of al-Mālikī (ca. 1081), *Tartīb al-Madārik* of Qādī 'Iyāḍ (d. 1149), *Ma'ālim al-Īmān* of al-Dabbāgh (d. 1295) and Ibn Nāḥī (d. 1433). As I have already noted, the anti-Fatimid milieu of Umayyad Córdoba, where al-Khushanī was writing, explains the importance that he assigned to Ibn al-Ḥaddād's disputations. Similar anti-Fatimid hostility also prevailed in Qayrawān after the triumph of the Zirid dynasty (972–1148), when Abū Bakr al-Mālikī would portray the Fatimids as archetypal tyrants and heretics in his commemoration of previous scholars in Qayrawān, the *Riyāḍ al-Nufūs*.

Ibn al-Haytham, who was the much younger contemporary of Ibn al-Ḥaddād, belonged to the minority Shī'a group of Qayrawān, who had had to conceal their faith during the Aghlabid period. He studied in the circles of the Iraqīs (Ḥanafīs) of Qayrawān and was affiliated with them, but also studied Shī'ī doctrines separately.²⁹ His father was evidently a learned man who, according to Ibn al-Haytham, "possessed many books and was competent in various areas of language, uncommon words, disputation, and jurisprudence."³⁰ It was under his father's influence that he took a special interest in disputation and "the books of the ancients," including Aristotle's *Logic*, among many other works by Aristotle and Plato.³¹ As he writes in his memoirs, the *Kitāb al-Munāẓarāt*, he became close to Abū 'Abd Allāh

²⁸ On the fragments, see Muranyi, *Beiträge*, 156–58; Schacht, "On Some Manuscripts," 225–58.

²⁹ Ibn al-Haytham, *Munāẓarāt*, 57–60 (translation at 109–12).

³⁰ Ibn al-Haytham, *Munāẓarāt*, 111.

³¹ Ibn al-Haytham, *Munāẓarāt*.

al-Shīʿī, the leader of the Fatimid revolution, and his brother Abū-l-ʿAbbās thanks to his education and devotion to their cause. It is not difficult to imagine that he must have regarded their tragic execution in 911 as a great personal loss, which also explains why he commemorated them later in life.³² Not much else is known about him, apart from what is recounted in the *Munāẓarāt*,³³ where he mentions his journey to al-Andalus as one of the two Fatimid ambassadors to the rebel Ibn Ḥafṣūn (d. 918), who rose against the Umayyads in 880 and declared allegiance to the Fatimids after 910.³⁴ According to Ibn al-Khaṭīb (d. 1374), who does not know the name of these two ambassadors, they even took part in many of Ibn Ḥafṣūn's military campaigns before he sent them back.³⁵ Some years later, Ibn al-Haytham faced serious troubles during a mission to the Maghrib, for which he blamed the governor of Tahert (Tialet, in modern Algeria), Masāla b. Ḥabūs, and his sister.³⁶ A few other sources mention Ibn al-Haytham as a high-ranking Fatimid *dāʿī* who was entrusted with important missions but, for reasons about which one can only speculate, he was not offered a position at the Fatimid court in al-Mahdiyya, nor in al-Manṣūriyya.

Ibn al-Haytham's *Kitāb al-Munāẓarāt* was later included in a large compilation of Ṭayyibī Ismāʿīlī works, the *Kitāb al-Azhār*, by Ḥasan b. Nūḥ al-Bharūchī (d. 1533): an Indian Ismāʿīlī who studied with leading Ṭayyibī scholars in Yemen.³⁷ But although the memoir was included in Poonawala's *Bibliography of Ismāʿīlī Literature* (1977),³⁸ it was not accessible to scholars until it was edited and translated by Wilferd Madelung and Paul Walker in 2001.³⁹ Only three quotations from the *Munāẓarāt* were previously known, included in the *ʿUyun al-akhbār* of the

³² On the execution of the *dāʿīs*, see Madelung and Walker, *Advent*, 31–41.

³³ See the summary in the “Introduction,” Madelung and Walker, *Advent*, 51–54.

³⁴ Ibn al-Haytham, *Munāẓarāt*, 2 (translation at 63–64). For a general context, see Halm, *Das Reich des Mahdi*, English: *Empire of the Mahdi*, 280; for Ibn Ḥafṣūn, see Tibi, “Umar b. Ḥafṣūn”; for Ibn al-Haytham's mission and the political influence of the Fatimids in al-Andalus, see Martínez Enamorado, “Fatimid Ambassadors,” 267–300. Similarly, the Umayyads supported anti-Fatimid rebellions. For example, they sent a fleet with soldiers, weapons, and supplies to support Abū Yazīd in the year 946, but the fleet returned after learning about the rebel's first major defeat at Mahdiyya. See Idris, *ʿUyūn*, 385–86.

³⁵ Ibn al-Khaṭīb, *Aʿmāl al-Aʿlām*, 2:32.

³⁶ Ibn al-Haytham, *Munāẓarāt*, 2 (trans. 64). Walker notes the possibility that the reference is to al-Mahdī's crack-down on the *dāʿīs* in 921–22 (2n3, trans. 64).

³⁷ See Walker's “Introduction” to Ibn al-Haytham, *Munāẓarāt*, 45–51.

³⁸ Poonawala, *Bibliography*, 34–35, 181; Gacek, *Catalogue*, 37–40; Daftary, *Ismaili Literature*, 110, 117; de Blois, *Arabic, Persian, and Gujarati Manuscripts*, 145–50.

³⁹ See Madelung and Walker, *Advent*.

Ṭayyibī chief *dāʿī* and historian Idris Imād al-Dīn (d. 1468), which was published in S. M. Stern's posthumous *Studies in Early Ismāʿīlism*.⁴⁰

So, in contrast to the account of Ibn al-Ḥaddād's disputations, which circulated widely in Mālikī circles for centuries, Ibn al-Haytham's *Munāẓarāt* appears to have enjoyed a very limited reception. Who, then, was the intended audience? Although Ibn al-Haytham was personally involved in two political missions against the Umayyads and was in constant contact with the scholars of Qayrawān, his *Munāẓarāt* is a work that was intended for readers within the *daʿwa*, the religio-political organization of the Fatimids,⁴¹ because the subject matter was too delicate to share with outsiders. Ibn al-Ḥaddād, for his part, had sought publicity, which he achieved by dispersing his account among his colleagues in Qayrawān. After his death, moreover, al-Khushanī had made use of it to bolster the Córdoba prince al-Ḥakam, whose father ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Nāṣir had declared his caliphate in 929 and who was thus in competition with the two other caliphates. The wider audience of al-Khushanī was the learned elite of al-Andalus and Ifrīqiya, who continued to copy the debates of Ibn al-Ḥaddād, while Ibn al-Haytham's work remained within closed Ismāʿīlī circles.

Ibn al-Ḥaddād's *munāẓarāt* with the Fatimid *dāʿī* Abū-l-ʿAbbās

Already, by mid-ninth century, the clandestine proto-Ismāʿīlī movement was capable of "conducting intensive *daʿwa* activity through a network of *dāʿīs*."⁴² The secret nature of this organization was preserved even after the establishment of the Fatimid caliphate. Perhaps for this reason, the Ismāʿīlī *dāʿīs* were not public preachers, but rather skilful disputants well versed in religious discipline and philosophy. Heinz Halm makes a valid observation about the formal resemblance of the word *munāẓir* (disputant) with the word *mukāsir* (breaker), the lowest rank in the hierarchy of the Fatimid *daʿwa*, who "had the task of 'working on' the pupil and disputing with him until all his arguments were refuted."⁴³ In several cases, these disputations resulted in the conversion of rulers to the Fatimid-Ismāʿīlī cause.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Stern, *Studies*, 100–104.

⁴¹ The *daʿwa*, literally "calling" or "summoning," was administered hierarchically and culminated in the person of the imam-caliph. Hence the agents of the *daʿwa* were called *dāʿīs*. For an accessible introduction, see Halm, *The Fatimids*, 56–70.

⁴² Daftary, *Ismāʿīlīs*, 98. The existence of such a unified movement in this period, however, is a subject of debate among scholars. See, for instance, Brett's recent monograph, *The Fatimid Empire* (5–7) where he problematizes this notion.

⁴³ Halm, *The Fatimids*, 58.

⁴⁴ See Hamdani, "Dialectic of Power," 6. Similarly, *dāʿī* al-Muʿayyad (d. 1078) converts the Būyid ruler of Fars, Abū Kālījār; *dāʿī* Abū Ḥatīm al-Rāzī converts the governor of Rayy Aḥmad

After assuming power in Qayrawān, the *dā'īs* and their local associates also challenged local scholars to debate over the most fundamental disagreements, which resulted in many "conversions."

This function of disputations in general, and these *munāẓarāt*, in particular, has been highlighted by many modern scholars.⁴⁵ What has been less discussed is the function and significance of the *munāẓarāt* narratives as texts, and the motivations behind their composition and circulation: the focus of this essay.

In the early days of Fatimid rule in Ifrīqiya, according to his account preserved in al-Khushanī's pro-Umayyad compilation, Ibn al-Ḥaddād had been summoned to the Old Palace of the Aghlabids, which had been turned into the headquarters of the new rulers, to take part in a session of disputation.⁴⁶ The central topic of this and subsequent debates was the superiority of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib to other companions of the Prophet Muḥammad and, by implication, the imams descended from him, according to Shī'ī beliefs. These disputations were certainly politically motivated, as the *dā'īs* were preparing the urban elite for the arrival of the new ruler, 'Abd Allāh al-Mahdī, who had been imprisoned in far-away Sijilmāsa (Morocco) before he was rescued by Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Shī'ī. The initiator of the disputations, as we have observed, was the *dā'ī* Abū-l-'Abbās, his older brother, who had been appointed Abū 'Abd Allāh's deputy when he departed for Sijilmāsa.⁴⁷ Evidently, during his interim rule in Qayrawān, Abū-l-'Abbās hoped to convince the local scholars of al-Mahdī's legitimacy.⁴⁸

The aged man had agreed to appear before the antagonistic *dā'ī* at the risk of losing his life, in order "to defend the tradition (*sunna*)," as al-Khushanī put it.⁴⁹ This "tradition" was the Mālikī or Medinese school of law (*madhhab*), of which Mālik ibn Anas (d. 795) was the foremost authority. But according to Shī'ī doctrines, only the imams of the Prophet Muḥammad's own lineage had the authority to interpret the sacred law. The Fatimids thus imposed Shī'ī law on the population and banned ruling or practicing according to other schools of law. Those who protested

b. 'Alī (r. 919–924); *dā'ī* al-Nasafī converts the Sāmānid emir Naṣr II b. Aḥmad (r. 914–943) through effective disputations: see Klemm, *Memoirs of a Mission*, 26–44, 29, 134n8.

⁴⁵ Daftary, *Ismā'īlīs*, 112, 127; Madelung, "Religious Policy," 97–104, 98; Halm, *Das Reich des Mahdi*, English: *Empire of the Mahdi*, 240–42; Halm, *The Fatimids*, 56–70; Ibn al-Haytham, *Munāẓarāt*, 26–32; Hamdani, "Dialectic of Power," 5–21.

⁴⁶ al-Khushanī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 199ff.

⁴⁷ Al-Qāḍī al-Nu'mān, *Iftitāḥ*, 192.

⁴⁸ Al-Qāḍī al-Nu'mān, *Iftitāḥ*, 192. "He [i.e. Abū-l-'Abbās] debated with them on the imamate and on judicial opinions in which they opposed the *ahl al-bayt*, and he silenced them. They were amazed at his proficiency."

⁴⁹ al-Khushanī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 199.

against the new regime were allegedly persecuted, although Mālikī biographical dictionaries tended to exaggerate the extent of Fatimid oppression. Despite these strictures, Ibn al-Ḥaddād continued to attend disputations with Abū-l-‘Abbās and was left unharmed. He then wrote down his account of these debating sessions and circulated the booklet among a group of his students in Qayrawān, a version of which was preserved by al-Khushanī.

Ibn al-Ḥaddād was only one of the many people who took part in debates with the *dāʿīs*—as it appears, willingly.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, his own account stresses his reluctance to visit the *dāʿī*’s residence without an invitation.

Abū-l-‘Abbās sent an envoy and I came to see him at the palace of Ibrāhīm b. Aḥmad b. Aghlab,⁵¹ where he was surrounded by his most prominent companions. I was accompanied by Mūsā al-Qaṭṭān.⁵² I greeted him and took a seat. Previously, all the people of our country, I mean the scholars (*ahl al-ʿilm*), had visited him without being sent after. Then I said to him: “There were people before you [i.e. the Aghlabids] in this palace and God knows, and our friends here know, that I never frequented kings, nor did I visit any of them without being summoned.”⁵³

In his account of the second session, he again notes the presence of other scholars but comments on their inability to answer a very basic question.

When I entered his place at the second session, he [Abū-l-‘Abbās] turned to the Medinan [Mālikī] and ‘Irāqī [Ḥanafī] [scholars], asking them “what is the *sunna*?” Someone mumbled: “The *sunna* is the *sunna*,” and none of them knew what else to say. So, he turned towards me and said: “I heard that you stress your belief in the Book [i.e. the Qurʾān] and the *sunna*, so, what is the *sunna*?” I replied: “The *sunna* has three aspects.” He said: “Tell us.” I said: “Conforming to whatever the Messenger of God (peace be upon him) commanded, refraining from what he forbade, and imitating what he did.”

Later, Ibn al-Ḥaddād not only presents himself as the sole competent defender of tradition against the Fatimids, he also stresses the compliance of the rival ‘Irāqīs, who apparently sided with the new rulers.

50 See Madelung and Walker’s useful discussion of these disputations in *Advent*, 26–31.

51 The Aghlabid emir (r. 875–902) who founded the Raqqāda palace city and was known for holding disputations.

52 Abū-l-Aswad Mūsā b. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān, also a student of Ṣaḥnūn and a companion of Ibn al-Ḥaddād. See al-Khushanī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 159.

53 For this and subsequent quotations, see al-Khushanī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 199–210. All translations are my own, unless otherwise indicated.

[In the third session,] I entered and he [Abū-l-‘Abbās] seated me near to himself. At that moment he was telling a man from among the ‘Irāqīs: “The teacher (*mu‘allim*) will always be more knowledgeable than the student (*muta‘allim*).” The ‘Irāqī said: “Yes, it is so” and those present were not uttering a word. I said: “Is anything left to say? Shall I speak?” He continued pressing the same point: “Is it not the case that the student will always need the teacher?” and the ‘Irāqī approved again. Then I knew that his aim was nothing but to stress the inferiority of Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq [in knowledge,] because he had once consulted ‘Alī about the share of an inheritance to which a grandmother was entitled.

Here, the *dā‘ī* was persuading the scholars to accept that, if the fourth caliph ‘Alī was superior to Abū Bakr, as a teacher is to a student, then he was the rightful successor to the Prophet, as the Shī‘a claimed, and not Abū Bakr. Ibn al-Ḥaddād boasts that he saw through the *dā‘ī*’s tactics every time and refuted his arguments.

In describing the fourth session, Ibn al-Ḥaddād admits that the *dā‘ī* was “closer to fairness, as if he was debating with me from a standpoint other than his own.” Despite this statement, Ibn al-Ḥaddād tells his readers that the disputations were not productive.

When I heard the words of a man who declared false what was obvious and deviated from the truth, I thought it was reasonable to avoid debating with him. This is because I argued against him neither with a rational argument nor analogical reasoning, but rather confronted him with the Book of God, the deeds of his Prophet, and the consensus of the Muslims. He, however, questioned me over and over and repeated himself without a definite proof or a clear demonstration. We seek refuge in God from confusion in religion and ask Him for support and direction as to the right course.

The account of these disputations thus captures the uneasy relationship between the Fatimids and the scholars of Qayrawān, and also glorifies the reputation of the aged Ibn al-Ḥaddād as the sole defender of the *sunna*, hence his attraction for his Umayyad-employed biographer.

Meanwhile, the Fatimid *dā‘ī* Ibn al-Haytham, according to his own memoirs, had been attending private *munāẓarāt*—discussions—with the *dā‘īs*, as well as attending their debates with local scholars, including Ibn al-Ḥaddād. But, as I have stressed, he wrote these memoirs almost forty years later, after the defeat of the rebel Abū Yazīd, which opened the doors for changes in Fatimid policies favourable to the Mālikīs of Qayrawān. This must have had a destabilizing effect on *dā‘īs* like Ibn al-Haytham, who had made enemies among Mālikīs, and so

galvanized him to circulate his own narrative of the events that had taken place decades before.⁵⁴ It would have been intended to refute the Mālikī narratives of early Fatimid *munāẓarāt* as coercive or persecutory. According to the later Mālikī author al-Dabbāgh, for instance, the Fatimids “forced people to accept their beliefs through disputation (*munāẓara*) and argumentation.”⁵⁵ And indeed, both sides agreed that the main objective of the debates was to convert undecided Qayrawānī scholars and to humiliate defiant opponents. However, according to Ibn al-Ḥaddād, neither side had actually conceded defeat; rather, both had agreed to disagree. This, in itself, appears to have upset Ibn al-Haytham, who boasts that he had actually refuted Ibn al-Ḥaddād’s written version, which “was dispersed among [Ibn al-Ḥaddād’s] companions.”⁵⁶

In his memoirs, moreover, Ibn al-Haytham mentions only one of the debates which took place between the *dāʿī* Abū ‘Abd Allāh and Ibn al-Ḥaddād.⁵⁷ Instead, he ascribes much more importance to his own discussions with eminent Ismāʿīlī *dāʿīs*, not only to commemorate his fallen revolutionary heroes but also to highlight—at a safe temporal distance, under a new caliph—his association with them. His own separate account of the debates between the *dāʿīs* and Ibn al-Ḥaddād, which he mentions in his memoirs, is lost, but it seems to have been known to Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī (d. 1023) who quoted it in his *al-Imtāʿ wa-l-Muʿānasa*, in order to exemplify the futility of disputations.⁵⁸ However, the parties actually involved in the debates, namely Ibn al-Ḥaddād and the Fatimid *dāʿīs*, both celebrated these disputations as a historical moment of brilliance, a wrestling match to be proud of, if not a total triumph over the opponent.

***Munāẓara* and the Politics of Writing a Biographic Entry**

In Mālikī biographical dictionaries, Ibn al-Ḥaddād is compared to none other than the famous traditionist Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 855), who had endured interrogations during the Abbasid *miḥna* due to his defiance of Aghlabid and especially Fatimid “tyranny.”⁵⁹ However, an important difference is that the latter is depicted as being strictly opposed to *munāẓara*, which he considered to be an innovation.

54 These reforms are discussed in Madelung, “Religious Policy,” 97–104.

55 “ajbarū al-nāsa ‘alā madhhabihim bi ṭarīq al-munāẓara wa iqāmat al-ḥujja,” al-Dabbāgh and Ibn Nāǧī, *Maʿālim*, 2:298.

56 Ibn al-Haytham, *Munāẓarāt*, 123.

57 See Ibn al-Haytham, *Munāẓarāt*, 123.

58 al-Tawḥīdī, *al-Imtāʿ*, 195; see Walker, *Advent*, 54–55.

59 For his complete hagiography, see al-Dabbāgh and Ibn Nāǧī, *Maʿālim*, 2:298.

While Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal “consistently refused to respond to theological questions on rationalistic terms” during the inquisition,⁶⁰ Ibn al-Ḥaddād eagerly engaged in disputations with the *dāʿī*.⁶¹ He also refuted his colleagues’ legal conformism (*taqlīd*) and criticized his teacher Saḥnūn’s compilation of Mālikī jurisprudence, the *Mudawwana*.⁶² These disagreements apparently led his fellow Mālikīs to desert him and turned the judge Ibn Ṭālib against him.⁶³ Thus, in writing up and disseminating his *munāẓarāt*, he was making a case for disputation as a legitimate method, at least in instances when the fate of the Mālikī tradition and the prestige of the group were at stake.

For the next generation of Mālikīs, as a result, Ibn al-Ḥaddād’s disputations with the Ismāʿīlī *dāʿī* Abū-l-ʿAbbās made him a hero of the Qayrawān *miḥna* as Mālikī identity and collective memory coalesced under continued Fatimid rule. As a poet from Qayrawān commemorated, “Was he not the tongue of the Muslims and their sword when they were tricked by the people of error and unbelief?”⁶⁴ Later Mālikī biographers presented the *munāẓarāt* of Ibn al-Ḥaddād as the highest point in his long career. According to ʿIyāḍ, for instance, disputation led to his prominence and his “winning the hearts of the people” (*mālat ilayhi qulūb al-ʿamma*).⁶⁵ The reports of his debates also served to exemplify the resilience of Mālikī scholars under political pressure from hostile rulers. They were copiously quoted in biographical dictionaries in order to glorify this staunch defender of the Mālikī tradition and to celebrate and legitimize their own status.

In fact, many of Ibn al-Ḥaddād’s other accomplishments are not celebrated to the same extent in these sources. His challenges to the doctrines of various schools and sects, his critical commentary on others’ works, and his rejection of Mālikī traditionalism and legal conformism (*taqlīd*, for which Saḥnūn’s associates censured him) are not emphasized. His biographers, although generously praising

⁶⁰ Soffer, “Theological *Majlis*,” 231. For the record, as Melchert points out, the discussions of the traditionalist circles were called *mudhākara*, where they engaged in “friendly” hadith recitation contests. Melchert, *Formation of the Sunni Schools*, 20–22.

⁶¹ Ibn al-Ḥaddād’s reconciliation of dialectics and Mālikī traditionalism resembles the approach of Ibn ʿAqīl (d. 1119), the Ḥanbalī jurist and master of disputation in eleventh-century Baghdad, who adopted *munāẓara* for legal argumentations. In other words, Ibn al-Ḥaddād’s shift toward Shāfiʿī methodology, by allowing personal judgment and accepting the authority of the *ḥadīth*, anticipated this later compromise between rigid traditionalism and rationalism. See Makdisi, “The Scholastic Method,” 650ff; Lapidus, *A History*, 82–90.

⁶² al-Khushanī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 149; ʿIyāḍ, *Madārik*, 352.

⁶³ ʿIyāḍ, *Madārik*, 352.

⁶⁴ Sahl al-Warrāq, quoted in al-Mālikī, *Riyāḍ*, 2:115; for Sahl al-Warrāq, see al-Mālikī, *Riyāḍ*, 2:489–94.

⁶⁵ ʿIyāḍ, *Madārik*, 71.

him for his piety, admit that his popularity was mainly due to his debates with the Ismāʿīlīs rather than his scholarly pedigree. By traditional standards, for example, “he had spent little time collecting written traditions and transmitting [them].”⁶⁶ Ibn al-Ḥaddād’s apparent Shāfiʿī leanings also did not help to advance his reputation among his Mālikī contemporaries.⁶⁷ Is it plausible, then, that Ibn al-Ḥaddād’s preference for rational investigations (*naẓar*) and disputations (*munāẓara*) was the reason for his neglect in transmitting the opinions of Mālik and other authorities, which constituted legal texts?⁶⁸ Was this another reason for the discord between himself and the other students of Saḥnūn? Given Ibn al-Ḥaddād’s ambiguous position, then, it is not surprising that only his debates in later life, which rehabilitated his Mālikī reputation, survive in an account that found its way into the biographical dictionaries.

The way that Ibn al-Ḥaddād’s disputations with rationalist theologians and the Ismāʿīlīs are presented in the Mālikī *ṭabaqāt* also illustrates the function of these biographical dictionaries as promoting a “traditionalist mode of argument for the legitimate authority”⁶⁹ of a legal school, aimed at empowering “a certain group of scholars to the exclusion of others.”⁷⁰ Despite the fact that Ibn al-Ḥaddād’s record was not unproblematic from a traditionalist standpoint, the biographers managed to adorn it with hagiographical details and incorporate it into their narratives. However, even the record of the debates was not unproblematic, since it reveals that the sessions were conducted on more equal terms than Mālikī biographers were ready to admit. On the one hand, they describe *munāẓarāt* as part of the *miḥna* that the Fatimids exerted upon the ‘*ulamāʾ*’ of Qayrawān. In support of this, they report that the sessions were administered unjustly and that it was clear from the outset that the Fatimids were not ready to accept the views of their opponents, but only to harass them.⁷¹ On the other hand, celebrated accounts of these and other debates between the Mālikī scholars and the *dāʿīs* suggest that the ‘*ulamāʾ*’

66 al-Khushanī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 148: “kāna qalīl al-ishtighāl bi-jamʿ al-kutub wa bi-l-riwāya.”

67 Ibn al-Ḥaddād apparently wrote a short commentary on al-Shāfiʿī and sent it to his prominent student Abū Ibrāhīm Ismāʿīl b. Yahyā al-Muzanī (d. 878) in Egypt, which is then cited as his refutation of al-Shāfiʿī by Mālikīs. However, in the introductory passage of this letter quoted by al-Khushanī, Ibn al-Ḥaddād complains about the intellectual climate in Qayrawān. He was close to the Shāfiʿīs of Qayrawān and was considered as inclined toward their *madhhab*. For the quote, see al-Khushanī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 150. Also, note the inherent resentment of the Mālikīs toward the Shāfiʿīs. See Bennison, *Almoravid and Almohad Empires*, 229.

68 al-Dabbāgh, *Maʿālim*, 295.

69 Stewart, “Introduction,” xxii. See also Turner, *Inquisition*, 140–50.

70 Makdisi, “*Ṭabaqāt*—Biography,” 392.

71 al-Mālikī, *Riyāḍ*, 2:60.

of Qayrawān themselves viewed the *munāẓarāt* sessions as an opportunity “to defend” the religion of God against the “heretics”: in other words, this was a suitable response to the *miḥna* and an opportunity to negotiate the status of the tradition and its bearers, the *ahl al-‘ilm* (religious scholars).⁷²

Furthermore, as George Makdisi has observed, it was precisely the *miḥna* that provided the rationale for the traditionalists’ compilation of the *ṭabaqāt*, in order “to identify the religious scholars who had the legitimate authority to determine orthodoxy.”⁷³ However, there was always more at stake than the question of “orthodoxy.” Imagining and legitimizing a given scholarly community and promoting its social and political interests was one of the functions of the biographical dictionaries. Therefore, it is hardly surprising that Ibn al-Ḥaddād should be applauded and remembered by the tradition for his *munāẓarāt*—even though that very tradition did not endorse disputations.

The Writing of the *Kitāb al-Munāẓarāt* in the Context of Controversies over Philosophical Doctrines in Fatimid Qayrawān

The first disputations staged by the Fatimid *dāʿīs* made a strong impression on the scholars of Qayrawān, but there is little evidence that similar provocative tactics continued. Sumaiya Hamdani argues that the Fatimid state became increasingly concerned with translating the Ismāʿīlī doctrines into a “working framework in a Sunni setting,” a necessity that gave rise to the flourishing career of the “legal-minded” *dāʿī* al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān (d. 974).⁷⁴ In fact, though, this was not a sudden departure from the old Messianic doctrines that had emphasized the role of the Mahdī-Qāʾim as the “lord of resurrection” and “the last imam and speaker [*nāṭiq*],” but a reform that began with al-Mahdī himself, partly in order to control the unrealistic expectations of his followers.⁷⁵ Many *dāʿīs* were reportedly executed for upholding controversial doctrines, such as believing in the divinity of the imam-caliph and abandoning the *shariʿa*.⁷⁶ Instead, the imamate was no

⁷² al-Mālikī, *Riyāḍ*, 75.

⁷³ Makdisi, “*Ṭabaqāt*”—Biography,” 373.

⁷⁴ Hamdani, *Between Revolution and State*, 53. Walker also observes that the *munāẓara* appears to have lost its importance after the revolutionary period with the exception of the vizier Ibn Killis’ *munāẓarāt*: Walker, “Fatimid Institutions,” 180–82.

⁷⁵ See Madelung, “Das Imamate,” 53ff. (translation at 72ff.) for pre-Fatimid doctrines, and 66–67 (translation at 84–85) for al-Mahdī’s reforms.

⁷⁶ Halm, *Das Reich des Mahdi*, English: *Empire of the Mahdi*, 247–50.

longer to be understood as an awaited event but as a “permanent institution”—a major departure from older messianic beliefs and in line with the Weberian notion of the “routinization of charisma.”⁷⁷ This doctrinal turn toward institutionalization was naturally reflected in teaching and curricula, as well. Esoteric doctrines were taught in private sessions to the faithful Ismāʿīlīs, while lectures in law were delivered to the public in the mosques of Qayrawān and al-Mahdiyya.

It is against this shift in state policies and new pressures on the *dāʿīs* that Ibn al-Haytham’s nostalgic recollection of the early disputations should be analyzed. During the reign of the first two caliphs, the Fatimid state had apparently pursued more aggressive policies toward the non-Ismāʿīlī subjects and imposed some restrictions on the activities of the Qayrawānī jurists. Some militant scholars, who resented the Fatimids’ enforcement of Shīʿī traditions, joined the rebellion of Abū Yazīd and several were killed in battle. However, after the third caliph al-Manṣūr bi-llāh (r. 946–953) defeated the rebels and restored Fatimid rule, he conceded that non-Ismāʿīlīs would not be obliged to perform Shīʿī rituals.⁷⁸ The activities of the *dāʿīs* were curbed, the exclusive claim of the Fatimid imams to knowledge was also downplayed, and the jurists of Qayrawān were allowed to transmit traditions and teach law according to their own schools.⁷⁹ Al-Manṣūr, who also composed a legal compendium, arranged for a teaching circle (*ḥalqa*), ostensibly for the study of Shīʿī law, in the Great Mosque of Qayrawān.⁸⁰ Information on this, probably originating in Qayrawān, comes from an anti-Fatimid source, the treatise *Tathbīt Dalāʾil al-Nubuwwa* by the Muʿtazilī judge ʿAbd al-Jabbār (d. 1025).

Ismāʿīl [al-Manṣūr bi-llāh] approached the jurists (*fuqahāʾ*) so that they let him have a study circle (*ḥalqa*) in the mosque dedicated to [the study of law according to] Jaʿfar b. Muḥammad [al-Sadiq]⁸¹ for his followers (*aṣḥāb*). A group [of them] sat there not mixing with the jurists, and in their circles they were talking about Plato, Ptolemy, and Aristotle. Then people

⁷⁷ Madelung, “Das Imamate,” 58 (translation at 77). For “routinization of charisma,” see Max Weber, *Economy and Society*, 1:246–49.

⁷⁸ Al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān, *Iftitāḥ*, 233.

⁷⁹ Madelung, “Treatise on the Imamate,” 69–78, 77. ʿAbd al-Jabbār also admits the leniency of al-Manṣūr toward the Sunnīs and reports that he stopped the activities of the *dāʿīs*: ʿAbd al-Jabbār, *Tathbīt*, 2:602.

⁸⁰ The mosque referenced in the quotation below must be the Great Mosque of Qayrawān since such negotiations would have been unnecessary in al-Mahdiyya or al-Manṣūriyya. But such a negotiation would have taken place after restoring Qayrawān to the Fatimids in 946.

⁸¹ The last Shīʿī imam recognized by both Twelvers and Ismaili Shīʿīs, a major authority in Shīʿī jurisprudence. On him, see Hodgson, “Djaʿfar al-Sādik”; and Gleave, “Jaʿfar al-Sadeq ii. Teachings,” 351–56.

said: “Those are heretics, unbelievers and enemies of the prophets, so what makes this the circle of Ja‘far b. Muḥammad [al-Ṣādiq]?”⁸²

While it is difficult to take this report at face value, it is not entirely inconceivable that the *ḥalqa* was not exclusively for the teaching of law and that some enthusiastic *dā‘īs* may have discussed philosophical and esoteric doctrines there. ‘Abd al-Jabbār, who wrote in Baghdād or Rayy (Ray, Iran), did not hesitate to relate fictitious material in order to discredit the Fatimids, yet some of the details he offers had some foundation in reality.⁸³ Therefore, one must also be cautious not to discard the “elements of truth” in the anti-Fatimid “travesties,” as M. Samuel Stern has characterized them.⁸⁴

And in fact, the *Munāẓarāt* of Ibn al-Haytham places the ancient philosophers among “the followers of the prophets” and monotheists.⁸⁵ It is also known that al-Manṣūr was familiar with the works of the Greek sages, thus he may have permitted his followers to study their books.⁸⁶ Since the philosophically oriented Ibn al-Haytham was the most prominent *dā‘ī* in Qayrawān at the time, it is likely that he took part in these teaching sessions at the mosque. The rest of ‘Abd al-Jabbār’s slanderous report supports this hypothesis:

Ismā‘īl [al-Manṣūr bi-llāh] had a brother named Yūsuf, who was studying books [of traditions] and inquiring of scholars [about religious knowledge]. He was a virtuous man and used to say: “We are the descendants of the Prophet, but we do not exalt anyone but the philosophers—the enemies of the prophets. Our *dā‘īs* are all but lowly liars, who commit all kind of shameful things. If we were the descendants of the prophets and if we loved the prophets our situation would have been different.” Then he would name the

⁸² ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Tathbīt*, 2:603.

⁸³ The bulk of his account comes from the well-known anti-Fatimid treatise of Ibn Rizām (ca. tenth century), quoted in Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist* (completed in 987) and extensively used by another anti-Ismā‘īlī author, the Damascene Akhū Muḥsin (ca. tenth century), whose account is preserved in later sources. For anti-Ismā‘īlī writings in Abbasid sources, see Daftary, *Ismā‘īlīs*, 7–10. For a recent study on the subject of Abbasid propaganda, see Jiwa, “Baghdad Manifesto,” 22–79. For the Baghdādī theologian, see Stern, “‘Abd al-Djabbār.”

⁸⁴ Stern, “Book of the Highest Initiation,” 58, 64. See also Madelung, “Das Imamate,” 61, 112–14 (translated by P. Crone as “The Imamate,” 80, 128–30), where he describes the anti-Ismā‘īlī works along similar lines.

⁸⁵ Ibn al-Haytham, *Munāẓarāt*, 88–90 (translation at 138–40).

⁸⁶ Halm suggests that the *dā‘īs* of Qayrawān may have been discussing the books of Iranian *dā‘īs* who mixed Ismā‘īlī doctrines with Neo-Platonic philosophy. See Halm, *Das Reich des Mahdi*, English: *Empire of the Mahdi*, 369.

dāʿīs one by one and whatever they were involved in. Among them [the *dāʿīs*] was Abū-l-Aswad and he was the one coupling with his daughter.⁸⁷

Although the name is slightly distorted here, it is possible to identify this Abū-l-Aswad with Ibn al-Haytham, who was known in non-Ismāʿīlī sources as Ibn al-Aswad.⁸⁸ The authenticity of this anecdote is, of course, problematic. Earlier, in the same chapter, ʿAbd al-Jabbār repeats the well-known trope that, according to the Ismāʿīlī doctrines, the restrictions of the sacred law will be lifted from those who reach the seventh (highest) level of initiation (i.e. *al-balāgh al-sābiʿ*): “One is not prevented from [intercourse with] his mother, or daughter, or sister, nor from wine, pork, fornication, sodomy, usury; no other thing is forbidden, of course.” Among those who reach the highest level of initiation, “sharing wives is just like sharing food,” claims ʿAbd al-Jabbār, who relates these practices to their adherence to Plato’s teachings.⁸⁹

While most of ʿAbd al-Jabbār’s reports of Fatimid decadence are fantasies,⁹⁰ some of his disparaging remarks emerged from specific polemical contexts.⁹¹ As such, they corroborate the accounts given by other authors, including Ibn al-Haytham, albeit from a completely different perspective. In this case, too, the core material can be found in the Fatimid sources, such as the *Sīrat al-Ustādh Jawdhār*, where details of the conflict between al-Manṣūr and his brothers and uncles are revealed.⁹² The accusation of *ibāḥa* (*ibāhat al-maḥārim*, “permitting the forbidden”),⁹³ too, is supported by al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān’s report on al-Mahdī’s punishment of a group of his followers who “renegaded, considered as lawful what is

87 ʿAbd al-Jabbār, *Tathbīt*, 2:603.

88 Walker identifies three other references to Ibn al-Haytham in non-Ismāʿīlī sources: Walker, *Advent*, 54–55.

89 See ʿAbd al-Jabbār, *Tathbīt*, 2:596. On *balāgh* (initiation into Ismāʿīlī faith after the convert has taken the oath (*ʿahd al-mithāq*)), see Daftary, *Ismāʿīlīs*, 129.

90 See al-Maqrīzī’s criticism of pro-Abbasid authors in his *Ittiʿāz al-ḥunafāʾ*, trans. Jiwa, *Towards a Shiʿi Mediterranean Empire*, 212–13.

91 For instance, Madelung suggests that accusations of unbelief, of disregarding the religious law and cursing the Prophet and his companion, were spread by the *fuqahāʾ* (jurists) of Qayrawān in order to justify their support for the Ibādī rebel Abū Yazīd against the Fatimids. See Madelung, “Religious Policy,” 97–104, 102.

92 al-Jawdhārī, *Sīrat*, 44–54 (trans. 55–64).

93 The official Fatimid *daʿwa* explicitly distanced itself from certain antinomian teachings that could have been interpreted as abrogation of the law by their opponents. On this, see Madelung, “Ibāḥa.” Nevertheless, these accusations are commonly used to discredit and delegitimize them. ʿAbd al-Jabbār’s comments, too, reflect these common ideological tropes that were also used the Qarmāṭians: see Brett, *Fatimid Empire*, 47–48.

prohibited and denied the exoteric (*zāhir*).⁹⁴ This scandal, which according to Ibn 'Idhārī's source involved drinking wine and eating pork during Ramadan, led to the execution and imprisonment of about two hundred men from Qayrawān, Beja, and Tunis in the year 921 (or 922).⁹⁵

Ibn al-Haytham may have been one of the *dā'īs* who came under criticism from Yūsuf, the imam-caliph al-Manṣūr's brother, who accused them of betraying the mission of the Prophet by associating themselves with the philosophers. Since the caliph himself was apparently interested in the works of ancient philosophers, these criticisms of his brother must have been aimed at his policies. We know, from the *Munāẓarāt*, that Ibn al-Haytham possessed books on the Greek sciences, spoke favourably of the philosophers, and showed off his knowledge of logic in his discussions with Abū-l-'Abbās. If Ibn al-Haytham was one of the accused, then he may have written the somewhat apologetic *Munāẓarāt* in this climate. It is also possible that he was involved in other dangerous controversies which may have contributed to his downfall. But whether his association with "unorthodox" doctrines played a role in this can only be surmised, because he does not elaborate on these misfortunes apart from vague, but significant allusions in his memoirs.⁹⁶

The *Munāẓarāt* was probably completed after the defeat of Abū Yazīd's rebellion and the restoration of Fatimid control over Qayrawān in August 946, as Walker has argued. He has further suggested that it was written before al-Manṣūr's official pronouncement as caliph in August 947, since he is not mentioned in the book by his throne name but only as "the son of the Imam."⁹⁷ Thus, the dates of composition fall within the year between the death of the second Fatimid caliph al-Qā'im in 946 and al-Manṣūr's enthronement in 947—which correspond to the dates of the measures instituted by al-Manṣūr during his stay in Qayrawān from August till October 946, when he left it in pursuit of Abū Yazīd. In light of this information, one could conjecture the following: Ibn al-Haytham belonged to the circle of rationalist-minded *dā'īs* who, like their colleagues in the Muslim East, mixed speculative methods with revelation, perhaps under the patronage of the caliph

⁹⁴ Al-Qāḍī al-Nu'mān, *Iftitāh*, 229. Al-Nu'mān's report here, and in his conversations with the Ismā'īlī believers in the *Majālīs*, confirm that this tendency among the *dā'īs* was a great concern for the state. As we see, their adversaries used these incidents to discredit the Fatimids.

⁹⁵ Ibn 'Idhārī, *al-Bayān*, 1:185–86. Ibn 'Idhārī's main source for this period is the Andalusian historian 'Arīb al-Qurṭubī (d. 980), whose anti-Fatimid bias should be noted. For the polemical nature of "these accusations of *ibāḥa* or antinomianism against the Ismailis" see Daftary's remark in *Ismaili Literature*, 18.

⁹⁶ Ibn al-Haytham, *Munāẓarāt*, 2–3 (trans. 63–64), 124–25 (trans. 171–72).

⁹⁷ Walker, *Advent*, 48–49, 174n191, 127 (trans. 174).

al-Manṣūr, whose interest in the ancient philosophers is known.⁹⁸ In this context, the concerns of a more conservative group may have been represented by the caliph's brother Yūsuf, who had other reasons to oppose the policies of his brother.⁹⁹ Associating the dynasty with rational sciences would have made the Fatimids very unpopular in the post-war period and jeopardized its rapprochement with the religious scholars of Qayrawān. Thus, this criticism may have echoed a broader attempt on the part of the ruling elite to control the *dā'īs*. In the *Munāẓarāt*, Ibn al-Haytham thus repeatedly emphasizes the need to support the *dā'īs* and the danger of humiliating them in front of a hostile public, lest it damage the reputation of the state and the *da'wa*. Perhaps this was an attempt to write something similar to the *ṭabaqāt* of the (Sunnī) '*ulamā*': for just as the '*ulamā*' positioned themselves against the rulers and measured their virtue according to their opposition to political power and their refusal to be co-opted by it, so the Ismā'īlī *dā'īs* also saw the need to renegotiate their scholarly authority with the ultimate authority of the Imam. Accordingly, Ibn al-Haytham makes a case for the recognition and protection of the *dā'īs* in his *Munāẓarāt*, which was probably addressed to someone in a higher position.¹⁰⁰

Conclusion

The disputations analyzed in this essay were written down in narratives of defiance and hagiography, triggered by the personal traumas experienced by their authors but also in response to broader religious and political issues. They both participated in the rhetorical battles ongoing between two opposing worldviews in early Islamic thought, traditionalism and rationalism, as well as in the "cold war" among the Fatimid, Umayyad, and Abbasid caliphates. The immediate context of their composition and transmission was the turbulent rise of the Fatimids in North Africa. On the one hand, this presented a serious challenge to the integrity of the Qayrawānī '*ulamā*', who found their unlikely hero in the person of the dissident polemicist Ibn al-Ḥaddād. But only with the advent of the Fatimids does

⁹⁸ See, for instance, al-Jawdhārī, *Sīrat*, 30 (Arabic text, 14–15), where al-Manṣūr invokes Galen (Jālīnūs) in one of his letters to Jawdhar the eunuch, to give him a piece of advice regarding his harsh treatment of his subordinates.

⁹⁹ For the internal opposition to the imamate of al-Manṣūr and his successor al-Mu'izz, see al-Jawdhārī, *Sīrat*, 44–54 (translation at 55–64). According to this source, the complaints of al-Manṣūr's relatives began after he returned to al-Mahdiyya in March–April 948 (al-Jawdhārī, *Sīrat*).

¹⁰⁰ In this respect, it is unlike the works by al-Qāḍī al-Nu'mān and al-Naysābūrī, who represented the views of the state and prescribed rules of conduct for the *dā'īs*. See al-Qāḍī al-Nu'mān, *Kitāb al-Himma*; al-Naysābūrī, *al-Risāla al-Mūjaza*.

he seem to have identified with the increasingly marginalized traditionalists and been accepted among them. Thereafter, he was gradually accorded the status of defender of the Mālikī tradition, due to the increasing ideological value of his disputations. On the other hand, Ibn al-Haytham's *munāẓarāt* with Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Shī'ī and Abū-l-'Abbās, and his memories of other *dā'īs*, were written down during a similar time of uncertainty for a group of *dā'īs* who may have feared the state's rapprochement with the antagonistic '*ulamā*' of Qayrawān. Therefore, the *Munāẓarāt* of Ibn al-Haytham not only commemorates the virtues of his colleagues but also speaks of the vices of his adversaries, as he and those like him negotiated the transformation of the messianic Fatimid *da'wa* into a caliphal state.¹⁰¹

101 He never fails to name his opponents and to underline their animosity toward the Shī'īs of Qayrawān in the account of his discussions with the *dā'īs*—the *Munāẓarāt*.

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Abstract This article discusses the significance of the writing and transmission of two accounts recording disputations (*munāẓarāt*) that took place in 909 CE, the year of the Fatimid revolution, in Qayrawān (modern Tunisia). These debates, in which local scholars of all politico-religious factions participated, were organized by the agents of the Fatimid *daʿwa* as part of their attempt to establish a Shīʿī caliphate. But the accounts themselves, written at different times and for different motives, were triggered by personal trauma and responded to broader political and religious issues, which helps to explain their inclusion in later narratives of defiance and hagiography. The first was authored by a local Mālikī debater, Saʿīd b. Ibn al-Ḥaddād, and immediately went into circulation. It then became part of the North African biographical tradition and was regularly quoted as a brilliant (if paradoxical) defence of Mālikī belief against “heretics and tyrants.” A different account of these disputations was written nearly forty years later by Ibn al-Haytham, a local Fatimid *dāʿī*. Unlike that of al-Ḥaddād, Ibn al-Haytham’s memoir, entitled *Kitāb al-munāẓarāt*, was written to commemorate an older generation of *dāʿīs*, especially the revolutionary brothers Abū-l-ʿAbbās and Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Shīʿī, both of whom had been executed in 911. Also unlike the previous record, this one circulated privately and only became known to modern scholars in the 1990s.

Keywords: *munāẓarāt*, disputation, Fatimids, ‘*ulamāʾ*’, Ifrīqiya, Qayrawān, logic and philosophy, *miḥna*, Mālikī, hagiography

MESSAGING AND MEMORY: NOTES FROM MEDIEVAL IFRĪQIYA AND SICILY

ALEX METCALFE

A NOTABLE FEATURE of the “digital” age has been the proliferation of short text messages, sent and received between cellphones and/or computers. To this we may also add the automated ability to convert speech to text (and vice versa) across a range of languages, which has combined with texting to reduce or even collapse some established differences between oral and written forms of communication. As the inbox has gained ascendancy over the letterbox and pigeonhole, so too has the capacity to store--and delete--text data. While it is true that vast amounts of messages are trivial, if we could access a filtered record of the most important it would constitute a valuable historical corpus. It was this idea that led me to see what could be recovered of missives from the medieval era when the documentary record was very much slimmer and when few written outputs were transmitted into later periods. The frame of reference for this study will be the central western Mediterranean, where we will turn first to an extraordinary body of notes in Arabic from Fatimid Ifrīqiya (roughly modern Tunisia) before visiting the multilingual environment of Muslim and early Norman Sicily. Here, as elsewhere, the problem for the medieval historian is not so much that there are no surviving reports of messaging, but rather that we know very little about how messages were transmitted and received in practice, and we can discern even less about the actual composition or literary form of notes. This type of writing was not intended to endure and, in most cases, it was not widely distributed either. Even so, many of the key issues of the study will be familiar to a present-day audience: questions of text conservation and loss; language choice and linguistic register of composition; oral and written interplay; the routing of messages; and the utility of notes as aides-mémoires in the construction of later records. One of the wider aims of this inquiry is to situate evidence for messaging in a new and positive light by regarding it as a heuristic tool for the historian, who is often faced with only scattered and fragmentary remains with which to work.

Notes from the *Life of Jawdhar*

When speaking of notes and messages in a medieval context, I mean something less than a charter or official petition in diplomatic terms, and something less than an artful letter coloured by rhetorical flourishes of *adab* or the *ars dictaminis*.

Short messages have perhaps always been the poor relations of letters, and I will stop short of discussing better known types of epistolography and diplomatic. Instead, we begin with notes in Arabic from the exceptional, and remarkably rich, Ifrīqiyan source that is the *Sīrat al-ustādh Jawdhar* (*The Life of Master Jawdhar*).¹ Jawdhar's *Sīra* records the texts of dozens of messages and notes, most of which had been passed between the Fatimid caliph al-Mu'izz (r. 953–975) and Jawdhar (d. 973), his high-ranking and most trusted official. In the *Sīra*, an important short message was referred to as a *ruq'a* (plural: *ruqa'* or *riqā'*) as opposed to a *kitāb* or *risāla*, which referred to a formal letter in the specific context of written communication.² In general, *ruq'a* could refer merely to "a piece of paper," but its specific use in literary and diplomatic contexts reveals important connotations that defined it precisely: in judicial terms, *ruq'a* meant a petition or court minutes;³ in commercial terms, it referred to a promissory note.⁴

The notes found in Jawdhar's *Sīra* were usually jussive, instruction-giving messages. By no means were they the expressions of idle chit-chat or witty repartee. The topics of messages varied, but they are best characterized by the orders, advice, or directives they contained. Aside from well-wishing, gift-giving, or reactions to recent events, most addressed a single political issue—often some matter arising from regional administration. Notes of this type are thus not to be confused with marginalia, epigrams, lists, scribbles, spells, recipes, graffiti, and many other lesser forms of short text.⁵ Instead, the *ruq'a* in a technical sense should be accommodated as a category of directive-giving diplomata in terms of its political, legal, and administrative gravity.⁶ Moreover, it is clear that high-ranking

1 *Inside the Immaculate Portal* (Manṣūr al-Jawdhārī, *Sīrat al-ustādh Jawdhar*). See also Canard, *Vie de l'Ustadh Jaudhar*. Henceforth, references are to the English–Arabic edition, abbreviated here to *Jawdhar*.

2 In the correspondence, *ruq'a* appears to be synonymous with *tawqī'* ("apostille," "directive"), although the latter term was seldom used. For examples, see *Jawdhar*, 31, 86 (English), 15, 82 (Arabic).

3 For *ruq'a* and its relationship with similar genres, see Naaman, *Literature and the Islamic Court*, 149–51; for *ruq'a* as "a petition" in Fatimid chancery and legal contexts, see Khan, *Arabic Legal*, 306; as a type of medieval "apostille," see Gründler, "'Tawqī'" (Apostille)," 101–29; as court minutes, see Messick, *Sharī'a Scripts*, 240–42; also Johansen, "Formes de langage," 333–76 (344n52, 344n57).

4 For this use in the Cairo Geniza letters, see Goitein, *Mediterranean Society*, 1:242, 245–47; 2:435, 458; 3:350.

5 On epigrams and their literary contexts, see Talib, *How Do You Say "Epigram"?*

6 For chancery documents and typologies (but excluding any reference to a *ruq'a*), see Björkmann, "Diplomatic," 2:301–16, especially 302–5.

scribes also kept copies of their correspondence, which in this case at least have survived as historical memories in their own right.

Quick replies were often written on the reverse of older notes and letters. On one occasion, Jawdhar penned a separate note (*ruq'a*) to accompany a letter (*kitāb*). A note-form reply was then returned on the back of the note, not on the back of the letter.⁷ The content of the notes appears to have been transcribed in full in both the manuscript and its editions. However, some formulae, such as an opening *basmala* or blessings on Prophet Muḥammad, were omitted by the medieval biographer.⁸ Otherwise, with the exception of wishes for the recipient's good health and God's protection, diplomatic formularies and religious invocations were minimal, although short extracts from the Qur'ān were often cited by the caliph himself.

The messages adhered to no rigid scheme of composition; they were off-the-cuff communications exchanged at the highest level of government and composed without the need of a third-party scribe—the caliph was often said to have penned them in his own hand (*bi-khaṭṭi-hi*).⁹ The Arabic was not devoid of stylistic convention, and the notes were composed in well-formed sentences. They were usually succinct and to the point: the shortest comprised ten words, although most *riqā'* consisted of about two hundred to five hundred words.¹⁰ A few were much longer than this. Rhetorical devices were limited, and a certain economy of expression was typical without lapsing into true note-form or laconic phrasing.¹¹ Stopping short of conversational expressions, the repeated use of the vocative *yā* ('O') to address Jawdhar by name suggests a degree of spoken familiarity and informality. It is not hard to imagine here a certain "parallelism of written and oral communication" as Adrian Gully put it.¹² There were thus only shades of difference between the oral and written language of notes. Moreover, in terms of subject matter, importance, authorship, or content, there were many striking similarities between these notes

⁷ *Jawdhar*, 89 (English), 84 (Arabic).

⁸ In a *kitāb* of the caliph al-Manṣūr, Jawdhar's biographer remarked that "it was a clear eloquent letter (*kāna kitāban shāfiyan balīghan*) written by himself from start to finish. This is a verbatim transcription (*ḥarfan ḥarfan*) of what it says after the *basmala* and blessings on the Prophet Muḥammad." See *Jawdhar*, 34 (English), 17–18 (Arabic).

⁹ *Jawdhar*, 97 (English), 94 (Arabic).

¹⁰ *Jawdhar*, 108 (in both Arabic and the English translation).

¹¹ See the observations and examples in Gründler, "'Tawqī'" (Apostille)"; also Matar and Vincent, "A Little-Known Note (*ruq'a*)," 46–56.

¹² Gully, *Culture of Letter-Writing*, 58. For wider perspectives on reading culture (with good bibliography and historiography) see also Hirschler, *The Written Word*.

and the many “letters” cited throughout the *Sīra*. The crucial differences were (merely) fuzzy degrees of diplomatic formality and political/legal standing.

Lost Histories and Lost Messages

The conservation of Jawdhār’s notes and messages are as exceptional as the richness of their content. Beyond this, we must turn primarily to the Arabic chroniclers for reports of messaging. While these are frequently found and offer wider perspectives, we are often hampered by a lack of specificity and detail. In medieval Arabic narrative sources, such as the near-contemporary *Iftitāḥ al-Da’wa* of al-Qāḍī l-Nu’mān, the generic term *kitāb* was used to refer to almost any missive from a message to a mandate.¹³ Elsewhere, the conveying of messages was sometimes implicitly spoken, but in most contexts of instruction-giving, dispatches from the field of battle, intelligence reports, requests for assistance and so on, the chroniclers’ choice of vocabulary was typically equivocal. Vague expressions such as “the news arrived” (*jā’ al-khabar*) did not specify the medium of transmission. Otherwise, the usual verb of choice was *arsala*. This refers to the action of sending, but it says nothing about whether this was in written or verbal form—or in combination. Unlike the act of sending, the reception of missives was usually implied and rarely considered of interest. Likewise, Arabic histories included little useful information, examples or descriptions of the message-carriers themselves.

Until the Norman conquest of Sicily, there exists relatively little variety by way of extant contemporary histories for much of the surrounding region, especially for the late-Fatimid/Kalbid period on the island. However, we know of at least three Arabic histories that pre-date 1121.¹⁴ This includes the account of a certain Abū Zayd al-Ghumārī, who is otherwise unknown.¹⁵ Another *Ta’rīkh Ṣiqillīyya* (*History of Sicily*) was composed by a certain jurist (*faqīh*), Abū ‘Alī l-Ḥasan ibn

13 Al-Qāḍī al-Nu’mān, *Founding the Fatimid State (Iftitāḥ al-Da’wa)*. Sometimes in the chroniclers, we find that an exchange of correspondence was implied. For example, in 964/965, “al-Ḥasan bin ‘Ammār [encamped with troops at Messina] exchanged letters (*kātaba*) [with the *amīr* in Palermo] and the *amīr* Aḥmad set out [from Palermo] with the army.” Al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-arab* 2:492. For an Italian translation, see *Biblioteca arabo-sicula* 2:131. Henceforth, *BAS*² (Ar.) and *BAS*² (It.) respectively.

14 This does not include Ibn Ḥawqal’s *Maḥāsin ahl Ṣiqillīyya* (Merits of the Sicilian People) in which the author was said to have given an account of both their virtues and then their vices, not simply an account of the latter, which is what seems to have survived in later redaction. See Yāqūt al-Hamawī, *Mu’jam al-buldān*, 1:128–29 and *BAS*² (It.), 1:210.

15 Al-Ghumārī’s history was mentioned by Ḥajjī Khalīfa, *Kashf al-Zunūn*, in *BAS*² (Ar.), 2:857 and *BAS*² (It.), 2:650 and al-Ṣafādī in his *Kitāb al-Wāfi*; see *BAS*² (Ar.), 2:799 and *BAS*² (It.), appendix, 15. On the Ghumāra Berbers, see Camps and Vignet-Zunz, “Ghomāra,” 3110–19. See also the comments of Amari in *BAS*², appendix, viii–x.

Yahyā which was repeatedly cited in the *Muʿjam al-buldān* of Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī (d. 1229).¹⁶ Indeed, an extraordinary note relating to the transmission of Sicilian histories, Yāqūt reported that

On the flyleaf of the History of Sicily I read in the hand of Ibn al-Qaṭṭāʿ the linguist that I found in a part of the *Sīrat Ṣiqilliyya* (Account of Sicily) a marginal note that in Sicily there are twenty-three cities, thirteen forts (*ḥisn*), and an unknown number of estates (*ḍiyāʿ*). Abū ʿAlī l-Ḥasan ibn Yahyā the jurist (*al-faqīh*) mentioned in the History of Sicily that, according to the *qāḍī* Abū l-Faḍl, there are eighteen cities in Sicily, the first of which is Palermo, and that there are at least 320 strongholds (*qaʿa*). In both the past and present, it has never ceased to be under [its own] control and not subject to the rulers around it. Their power has become great through its defences and abundance.¹⁷

This not only links Yāqūt's work directly to that of Abū ʿAlī, but also to the famous Sicilian anthologist, poet, and grammarian, Ibn al-Qaṭṭāʿ (d. 1121)—who was himself the author of a History of Sicily.¹⁸ Furthermore, his remarks show how

16 Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī, *Muʿjam al-buldān*, in *BAS*² (Ar.), 1:112, 115, 125; *BAS*² (It.), 1:186–87 (and the important 187n2), 191, 204. Nothing is known of Abū ʿAlī al-Ḥasan, although his common combination of names may place him in the Fatimid period. From the quoted fragments that survive, his “history” is more of a political geography/gazetteer of Sicily, rather than an annalistic chronicle. It reveals an intriguing knowledge of Byzantine hagiography, pre-Islamic and local Christian place-naming traditions, and an interest in the existence of ruins from classical antiquity. See Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī, *Muʿjam al-buldān*, in *BAS*² (Ar.), 1:125–26 and *BAS*² (It.), 1:204–205 and 204–205n3; 206. Also of note is that the author referred to Marsala by an Arabicized version of its old name, Lilybaeum; he called Palermo “Balarm” rather than al-Madīna as Christians were later wont to do. On this, see Ibn Jubayr, *Riḥla*, in *BAS*² (Ar.), 1:85–86 and *BAS*² (It.), 1:146. In both cases, the choice of terms is suggestive of an autochthonous Sicilian, perhaps a Christian or a convert to Islam. He also showed a striking support for insular independence that resonates with Kalbid political thought that emerged from the 970s when Sicily was freer from both African and Egyptian influences. Although we are reduced to supposition, it is tempting to place Abū ʿAlī in this wider political and historical milieu.

17 Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī, *Muʿjam al-buldān*, in *BAS*² (Ar.), 1:122 and *BAS*² (It.), 1:199–200.

18 Ibn al-Qaṭṭāʿ is said to have left the island shortly after the start of the Norman Conquest bound for al-Andalus and thence to Egypt where he spent the rest of his life. On this, see Rizzitano, “Ibn al-Qaṭṭāʿ,”; “Notizie bibliografiche su Ibn al-Qaṭṭāʿ ‘il siciliano.’” On his poetry, see Capezio, “Ibn al-Qaṭṭāʿ,” 79–96. Given that Yāqūt had never ventured further west than Egypt, then this was the likely point of intersection for encountering the copy of Abū ʿAlī that Ibn al-Qaṭṭāʿ had also read, and indeed, had probably exported with him on leaving Sicily. Yāqūt's comments have thought-provoking implications for Sicilian historiography, not least because they challenge the idea that the Kalbids, as faithful lieutenants of the Fatimids, lacked the ambition to foster their own dynastic historians as the Zirids had done. For that view, see Brett, *Rise of the Fatimids*, 362; “Central Lands,” 49.

a memory of Sicilian history had reached both contemporary and later Muslim audiences beyond its shores, even if that knowledge had not been transmitted into the subsequent Norman period on the island itself. As such, this helps to account for the wide historiographical gap between the use and survival of pre- and post-Norman Conquest sources for Sicily. Instead, that which prevailed in chronicle form on the island were Latin (and later, French) accounts of the Norman victors.¹⁹ The main counterblasts to these that have survived into the modern period were polemical Arabic poems penned by Sicilian Muslims who wrote outside the island as émigrés.²⁰ However, as the Cairo Geniza letters show, the civil strife in the 1050s, and early part of the Norman Conquest in the 1060s, generated a flurry of Sicily-related correspondence.²¹

Messengers and Messaging in the Norman Conquest Sources

The narrative sources for the Norman period are not only more plentiful and diverse than the extant Arabic ones, but they were often closer to events in time and place too. In the presentation manuscript of Peter of Eboli's *Liber ad honorem Augusti* (*Book in Honour of Augustus*, i.e. Henry VI), made around the end of the Norman period, we find a total of twenty-one carefully made illustrations of messengers (*cursores* or *nuntii*), who are almost always represented carrying a physical letter.²² The messengers are of low status: they are plainly dressed and each carries his own supplies and a walking staff for the journey. They are often made to appear in subservient poses as they hand over (rather than speak) their message to the recipient. Moreover, as visual conveyors of "breaking news," they also served as a dramatic literary device to introduce an episode of importance, not unlike the role of messengers in a Classical Greek tragedy. Unfortunately, this sort of visual and literary clarity is not as obvious in the sources for the Norman Conquest over a century earlier. The Latin of the Christian chroniclers shares many

19 The surviving accounts being: Malaterra, *De rebus gestis*; Amatus of Montecassino, *Storia*; William of Apulia, *La Geste*, and the anonymous *Historia Sicula*.

20 On these sources, the most recent monograph study is that of Granara, *Narrating Muslim Sicily*.

21 I hope to be forgiven for omitting discussion of the Cairo Geniza corpus of peer-to-peer messages sent between merchants as they are barely comparable in diplomatic terms to the types of messages under discussion. However, they did share a common logic and style shaped by the need for fast and effective communication as well as clear instruction-giving. For translations and context respectively, see Simonsohn, *The Jews in Sicily*; Gil, "Sicily," 96–171.

22 The missives were depicted as square or in rolled form. See Peter of Eboli, *Liber ad honorem Augusti*, 59, 79, 151, 154, 167, 191.

of the same ambiguities found in the Arabic of the Muslim historians.²³ The inherent doubts about how a message could be received are born out in a stanza of Geoffrey Malaterra's *De Rebus Gestis* in which the Greeks of Durazzo send a letter (*chartula*) to the emperor which "says" its contents: "A letter is sent to Constantinople / It says that the enemy are outside for battle."²⁴ A similar ambivalence about messages delivered by word or in writing is also found in other Latin conquest sources.²⁵ Only occasionally can the language of communication be inferred with a degree of certainty. For example, when Count Roger sent a messenger (*lator*) to a flotilla of pirate ships anchored off the coast of Taormina, the ensuing negotiations, which took place on board, were most probably held in Arabic given that the ships were from Africa and that the pirates swore that they were acting *ex edicto regis* of the Zirid ruler of Ifrīqiya, Tamīm.²⁶ As for the ambiguity of *edictum* as an oral or written command, this term also occurs shortly afterwards when Roger issued an order (*exiit edictum*) that the enemy should be prevented from gathering supplies.²⁷ The same noun is also used in the following juxtaposition in which an oral context for the instruction is clearer: *ex edicto principis tempus scribendi imminet*.²⁸ Tipping the balance again in favour of orality, *ex edictu* was used by Malaterra to describe Urban II's call to crusade in his famous address at Clermont.²⁹

23 One example from many will suffice to highlight this. In 1063, while travelling, Count Roger is said to have received a message that Cerami had been attacked by the enemy: "media via, nuntio accepto quod Ceramum ab hostibus impugnaretur." Here, *nuntius* could refer either to a messenger, a message, or even figuratively to "news." As for the common verb *accipere*, it is only marginally less problematic: its fundamental idea of "take" or "receive" could be understood in either an abstract or a concrete sense. See Malaterra, *De rebus gestis*, 2:33. Since the new critical edition of Malaterra's text by Marie-Agnès Lucas-Avenel is not yet fully published at the time of writing, I have restricted references here to the relevant book and chapter without pagination.

24 Malaterra, *De rebus gestis*, 3:25: "Constantinopolim chartula mittitur / Hostes in proelio adfore dicitur."

25 A couple of examples from several: "Guiamar sent a message [...] when the emperor heard the message that Guiamar had sent" ("Dont, quand li emperéor ot entendu ce que Guaymarie lui mandoit"). See Amatus of Montecassino, *Storia*, 2:12. In William of Apulia's chronicle, Guiscard's envoys carried his words to Guiamar "cumque potentatus coepisset crescere nomen / Virtutisque suae, legatos mittere coepit, Qui sua deferrent generoso verba Gisulfo": William of Apulia, *La Geste de Robert Guiscard*, bk. 2, 154, lines 416–18.

26 Malaterra, *De rebus gestis*, 3:17.

27 Malaterra, *De rebus gestis*, 3:18.

28 Malaterra, *De rebus gestis*, 3:1.

29 Malaterra, *De rebus gestis*, 4:24: "ex edictu Urbani papae expeditio versus Ierusalem ab undique terrarum ferventissima erat."

In Malaterra's chronicle, when communication via envoys refers unambiguously to a written message, it was issued in a formal setting, such as the missives sent by the pope or a high-ranking Byzantine source. For example, at the Norman siege of Bari, its Byzantine governor wrote to the emperor explaining, *chartulis adnotans*, the dire situation facing the city.³⁰ An envoy (*legatus*) then showed the emperor the letters, to which he added a speech urging him to help. Here, again, we meet the helpful idea of "parallelism of written and oral communication." The emperor then read the letters and ordered a fleet to be made ready.³¹

Of letters sent to the Normans, a couple of examples stand out—not least for their impressive visual impact. Here, one thinks of the honorific title bestowed on Roger's leading official, Christodoulos, by Alexios I Comnenos in 1109, which was made in gold letters on purple vellum.³² Prior to this, when the emperor Alexios invited Latin-rite prelates from southern Italy to a council in Constantinople, he did so by sending legates bearing missives written in golden lettering.³³ In correspondence from Rome, Roger's brother Robert Guiscard received letters from Gregory VII in 1082 expressing the pope's concern (*litteris continentibus angustiam suam acceptis*) and also asking him to provide help.³⁴ Long-distance diplomacy with the Normans was not exceptional and was often part of ongoing exchanges that extended throughout all phases of the Conquest.³⁵ As such, the Norman leaders were gradually gaining first-hand knowledge of how powerful regional rulers expressed themselves when they wanted to make an impact.

What then can be said of the written types of lesser message forms sent during the Norman Conquest itself? On a rare occasion we are explicitly told that the Normans dispatched written orders: "the duke [...] writing out clear instructions (*perscribens*), called for money and supplies across all Apulia and Calabria for an

30 Malaterra, *De rebus gestis*, 2:43.

31 Malaterra, *De rebus gestis*, 2:43: "Acceptas epistolas imperatori repraesentare vadit: epistolis orationem exhortatoriam ut subveniat, addit. Imperator vero, susceptis epistolis ac perlectis [...] classem in mari parare facit."

32 *I diplomati greci ed arabi di Sicilia*, 58. For a rare, but poor, image of the privilege, see *L'età normanna e sveva in Sicilia*, 34.

33 Malaterra, *De rebus gestis*, 4:13: "Imperator [...] invitat eum per eosdem legatos chartulis, aureis litteris scriptis."

34 Malaterra, *De rebus gestis*, 3:33.

35 One thinks, for example, of the letter sent in October 1080 by Gregory VII to the *giudice* of Cálari in Sardinia, admonishing him to bring his personal conduct into line with Reform principles while at the same time issuing a disguised threat that control over Sardinia had been sought by the Normans among others. The petition to the papacy had come *non solum a Normannis et a Tuscis ac Longobardis sed etiam a quibusdam ultramontanis*. See *Monumenta Germaniae Historica* (MGH). *Das Register Gregors VII*, 8:529.

army that would march with him against the emperor in Rome next summer.”³⁶ Specific vocabulary and its collocations used by Malaterra reveal some important synonyms, such as the term *chartula*, noted above.³⁷ The clearest example of this is the famous incident after the battle of Misilmeri in 1068, when the Muslims’ carrier-pigeons, which could be fitted with tiny messages (*chartulis*), were dipped in blood and sent back to Palermo.³⁸ Clearly, these Arabic messages could not have been long. On a couple of occasions, *chartula* seems to be loosely equivalent to both *epistola* and *chyrographum*.³⁹ *Chartula* was also the term used by Malaterra for a papal decree.⁴⁰ This latter term referred only to written privileges, concessions, or legal contracts drawn up between two parties; in each case, one party was Norman.⁴¹ We can, then, infer a range of written communications in this period. But how far into other related fields did the Normans’ writing practices extend at this time?

In this respect, it is striking that Malaterra said his work had been composed from orally transmitted sources of repute (*fama*).⁴² That he had no chronicle source on which to draw also explains his plea that “if you discover events noted down in the wrong order [...] the fault should not be ascribed to me, but rather to

36 Malaterra, *De rebus gestis*, 3:35.

37 For *chartula*, see Malaterra, *De rebus gestis*, 3:26–27; 4:13, 4:39.

38 Malaterra, *De rebus gestis*, 2:42.

39 For the use of both *chartula* and *chyrographum* as referring to a written contract made between a notary attached to the Byzantine army and Arduin, the Greek-speaking leader of the Salernitan faction who mediated on behalf of the Normans serving in the Greek army after the fall of Syracuse, see Malaterra, *De rebus gestis*, 1:8. The difference between *chartulae* (messages conveyed by carrier-pigeons of the Muslim forces at the battle of Misilmeri) and *epistolae* (sent during the siege of Bari to the emperor in Constantinople) is one of style, rather than substance: cf. Malaterra, *De rebus gestis*, 2:42 and 2:43. *Epistola* was also used in the sense of a dedicatory preface or prologue at the start of his work.

40 Malaterra, *De rebus gestis*, 4:39.

41 Were the Normans using some type of indented document? Although they are otherwise unattested in this period, the logic behind the use of a double text may have informed the rationale for bilingual agreements and confirmations, such as those found in the earliest documents of the Norman counts, later in the royal Sicilian *Dīwān*, as well as in al-Andalus. On medieval chirographs, see Bedos-Resak, “Cutting Edge,” 134–61. For *chyrographum* in Malaterra, *De rebus gestis*, see 1:8; 3:1 (for a binding written agreement); 3:22 (for a marriage contract); 4:7 (for the foundation charters of new bishoprics), and 4:10 (for the renewed friendship of Bohemond and Guiscard). Malaterra also used *chartula* as a synonym for both *epistola* and *chyrographum*, see Malaterra, *De rebus gestis*, 2: 42, 43; and as a papal decree, 4:39. For a comparative view with interlinear, bilingual treaties from al-Andalus, see García-Velasco, “Alā fūr Tuṭīla,” 235–57.

42 Malaterra, *De rebus gestis*, 1:40: “Nunc vero, qui non quidem omnia, quae memoranda forent, sed pauca i quae fama didicimus.”

those who told me about these events (*relatoribus*)."⁴³ One glaring problem with this claim is that the chronicler himself quoted in full Urban II's papal decree that conceded legatine powers to Roger and his heirs in 1098. That striking passage, however, appears to conclude Malaterra's work, and it may be of note that most examples in which writing is attested occur in the second half of the chronicle. In part, this may simply reflect a fresher memory of events, but it may also be due to a post-conquest trend to write up that which had previously been said.⁴⁴ Indeed, the process of firming up oral agreements can be seen in Urban II's decree itself when the pope wrote that "as we have promised in words, so we now confirm by the authority of letters."⁴⁵

We should, however, be wary of overstating a simple memory-to-written-record transition. Orality and the need for a rousing story in song or poem kept tales of heroic knights vivid and their fame in circulation for the benefit of contemporary audiences. Indeed, at the start of his work, Roger himself instructed Malaterra to ready himself for the task of writing events down in an easy-to-understand style.⁴⁶ By the final book, Malaterra himself claimed that he had succumbed to pressure to commemorate deeds in song in order to bring his style in line with the custom of the day by appealing to a younger generation.⁴⁷

Interpreters, Translators, and Intermediaries

The Normans had long campaign experience of sending dispatches in the field and on the move, at any time and from any place. Clearly, sending and receiving messages (whether oral or written) were vital to the success of their conquest operations, and the observation that the Normans were surrounded by a small body of trusted envoys and scribes with the necessary linguistic skills for these

⁴³ Malaterra, *De rebus gestis*, prologue.

⁴⁴ In some cases, early grants of lands in the 1070s appear to have been made without any immediate recourse to writing. Arguably the early written grants of the 1090s were in this sense already "confirmations" (but not renewals).

⁴⁵ Malaterra, *De rebus gestis*, 4:29: "sicut verbis promissimus, litterarum ita auctoritate firmamus."

⁴⁶ Malaterra, *De rebus gestis*, prologue: "ipsa principis iussio ad hoc hortata est, ut plano sermone et facili ad intelligendum, quo, ut omnibus facilius quidquid diceretur, patesceret, exararem."

⁴⁷ "Si esset unde nova et elegantior poëtria, novo duci adhibenda esset; ut facundior sermo a iuvene, novarum rerum, ut in tali aetate assolet, appetitore, novo stilo novos favores suo merito extorqueret. Sed ne, stilum mutando, hoc quasi adulatione facere dicamur, prioris poëtriaae ordine servato, orationis seriem exequamur": Malaterra, *De rebus gestis*, 4, prologue. For a fallen knight commemorated in verse, Malaterra, *De rebus gestis*, 3:16.

tasks is a well-made one.⁴⁸ From their earliest days in south Italy, the Normans had become accustomed to operating across and between different languages, and by the end of the Conquest their entourage doubtless included notaries with skills in Latin, Greek, Arabic, Norman French, and speakers of local dialects too.

The importance of interpreters, translators, and intermediaries on whose skills the Normans were highly dependent is worth a closer look. The fascination with envoys in the southern Norman histories is eye-catching for the amount of attention they were afforded, indirectly illuminating the Normans' behaviour, mentality, and attitudes. A couple of examples spring to mind: that of a named Norman knight, famed for knocking a Byzantine envoy's horse unconscious before honouring him with a better one on which to return; and the dapper figure of Jocelyn of Corinth, a Norman in the service of the Byzantines, dressed in swish Greek garb and acting as a well-respected emissary.⁴⁹ One also thinks about the amount of space given in the chronicles to the failure of the Maniakes' expedition to retake Sicily between 1038 and 1042.⁵⁰ This drawn-out episode hardly showed the Normans in their best light since they had helped to undermine the expedition itself, abandoning an otherwise successful campaign to return to the mainland. Instead, it is tempting to think that the moral of this enduring and widely circulated tale was the unjust treatment meted out to the bilingual intermediary, Arduin, who was asked by the Normans to obtain a chirograph as guarantee of safe passage across the Straits of Messina to Calabria.⁵¹

Episodes in the chronicles that involve envoys often serve to reinforce the Normans' sense of the deserved treatment for trusted non-Norman allies, whoever they might be, playing up to their role as sincere defenders of all who did not oppose them: an idea later taken up as a theme in the mid-twelfth-century *Historia Sicula*.⁵² Given their dualistic disposition toward helping friends and harming enemies, it is also worth revisiting the earliest accords made between the Normans and the conquered peoples of their domain. These compacts were

48 See, inter alia, Takayama, *Administration*, 26–32; Johns, *Arabic Administration*, 63–72.

49 Malaterra, *De rebus gestis*, 1:9, 2:43.

50 Malaterra, *De rebus gestis*, 1:8; William of Apulia, *La Geste de Robert Guiscard*, 1:110; Amatus of Montecassino, *Storia*, 2:14, 72–73; Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum*, 425–26. Such was the perceived importance of the Maniakes' expedition that its longest and most detailed treatment appears in the latest of the chronicles—the mid-twelfth-century *Historia Sicula* (cols. 747–50).

51 For references, see n50 above. The chirograph was presumably written in at least Greek, since this was the language shared by Arduin and the Byzantine commanders.

52 For discussion of key themes in this work, see Aspinwall and Metcalfe, "Norman Identity."

central to the earliest formal relationships between the two faith communities. But how were these vitally important agreements concluded: verbally or in writing?

Treaties with the Conquered Peoples

When Malaterra described the incident with the Arabic-speaking African pirates, he also mentioned their entry as allies into Roger's service—*foedere suscepto*—without any apparent recourse to a written document.⁵³ This expression (with minor variants) was also used in association with the surrender of Muslim towns.⁵⁴ In some cases, we find references to oath-taking to confirm the pledges made, but on no occasion do we find any specific reference to a written agreement. So, rather than translating *foedere confecto* or *foedere composito* as “having drawn up a treaty,” thereby implying that a formal written record was made, it should probably be rendered more neutrally as “when an understanding of fealty had been reached.” This interpretation finds support in the sequencing of events around the fall of Castrogiovanni in 1086. First, the protagonists made some sort of bargain (*foedere interposito*) before the town's Muslim lord (Chamutus) was invited to discuss with the Normans its possible surrender. After a planned distraction, the town was then attacked; an agreement was reached (*foedere composito*); the townsfolk were reconciled to the count, and the town was handed over—in that order.⁵⁵

On reflection, when I once wrote that “the basis of interfaith diplomacy to guarantee peace and security was made on terms imposed by the Normans, but in terms proposed by the Muslims because the treaties [...] were specifically drawn up ‘according to their own [Islamic] law,’” I had thought that this implied the existence of a document, probably written in Arabic at least, and quite possibly with the input of a trained Muslim scribe-*cum*-jurist.⁵⁶ But given the phrasing that Malaterra uses for such agreements, in tandem with a context of prevailing orality, I am now in serious doubt about whether anything was formally written down at the time. The little that we can infer without going beyond the evidence is that there had been some mutual agreement confirmed by swearing on oath, by which the Normans were to be recognized by the tribute-paying Muslims as lords,

⁵³ Malaterra, *De rebus gestis*, 3:17. A second meeting had to be abandoned when the pirates decided to sail off due to the winds.

⁵⁴ Malaterra, *De rebus gestis*, 3:18 for Palermo; 2:11 for the fall of Trapani; after the fall of Taormina: (*foedere confecto*); 3:21 for Cinisi (*foedere component*); 4:3 for Syracuse (*foedere composito*); and 4:6 for Castrogiovanni: 4:6 (*aliqua composita confederatione*).

⁵⁵ “*Foedere composito, comiti reconcilantur, castrum deditioni adiicitur*”; cf. the surrender of Noto, “*reliqui, foedere composito, deditione sese et urbem reddunt*”: Malaterra, *De rebus gestis*, 4:3.

⁵⁶ Metcalfe, *Muslims of Medieval Italy*, 106.

and the Muslims would not have to accept Christian law and faith in place of their own. There was no mention of, nor compelling need for, a document at this time. No written confirmations relating to the Muslims' initial surrender are known or referred to in later Norman (or Staufen) times either.

Some Concluding Thoughts

Based on the many examples of high-level exchanges of messages between the Fatimid caliph and his leading official, Jawdhar, it seems that the genre of "notes" has fallen through the netting of diplomatic and literary studies, but it might be accommodated into both, albeit as a relatively low form of composition with which it exhibited many common features. These include shared points of logic, a similar rationale for their existence, as well as a direct and immediate expression addressed to its intended readership.

The chronicle sources for the late Fatimid and early Norman periods in Sicily do not afford us such specific examples as are found in the messages from Fatimid Ifrīqiya. However, it is clear that the sending of messages during the Norman Conquest of the island was of vital importance to its success. The lack of clarity about whether messages were written or not highlights the abstruse interplay of oral and written cultures with what appears to be simple speech-to-text messaging and perhaps vice versa at the point of the reception. However, their prolific use suggests that they were an important source of (now lost) political and legal-administrative memory attested at the very beginning of a period of radical political change, the longer-term outcomes of which were far from clear at the time.

The limited sources at our disposal indicate that some Muslim chroniclers had left the island, taking their histories with them. In the interim, the Normans had not written down much of historical or administrative consequence until the 1090s. Equally, there is no reason to suppose that anything written down had been carefully curated (with the exception of Urban II's decree of legatine powers). The lack of paperwork may even have extended to the initially agreed-upon grants and rewards made to the Normans' allies. Similarly, there is no clear evidence that interim agreements with the Muslims, which would form the basis of lasting compacts between the conquerors and the conquered peoples, had been written down, let alone written *up*, although over time it is possible that the increase in references to specific details of written instruments by Malaterra following the fall of Palermo reflects an attempt to keep a track of events.⁵⁷ Even so, there is

57 Of eight specific dates reported by Malaterra, there is a curious bunching between 1084 and 1086. Thus: October 25, 1061; June 28, 1074; February 6, 1084; September 9, 1084; October 1, 1085; May 20, 1085; March 1, 1086; July 25, 1086.

no reason to suppose that this was done in a comprehensive or systematic way. On the other hand, we can be surer that the Normans had engaged in complex, long-distance, written diplomacy during the Conquest itself, most notably with the papacy. In so doing, this generated more sources that were used in the later construction of Norman historical memory.

In any event, it is evident that, throughout the Conquest period, Norman commanders had the ability to send and receive messages of different types and different languages while operating in the field in testing circumstances. At least some order-giving was written down, but much else relied on word of mouth, memory, and oaths. Over the course of the Conquest generation, the Normans had time to perfect this practice through the linguistic skills of those who accompanied them and on whom they remained heavily dependent. Norman messengers in this period were therefore not like the *cursores* and *nuntii* in Peter of Eboli's illustrations from the end of the 1100s, who were merely couriers delivering letters. Rather, Conquest-era messengers played complex and integrated roles as scribes, envoys, diplomats, and negotiators, and quite possibly as comital archivists, too. Elements of this *ad hoc*, in-the-field style of governance, which was well-suited to itinerant multilingual rulership of the Conquest period, may even be seen in some of the earliest surviving charters issued around Sicily from the mid-1090s. By then, these exhibited many of the key ingredients of politico-cultural diversity, including the Normans' appropriation of, and increasing appetite for, different languages that became hallmarks of Sicilian rule and the royal chancery post-1130.

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Abstract This essay examines the practice of messaging and the sending of note-form missives. It does so from the particular perspective of the medieval western Mediterranean where evidence for messages not only shows their importance as fast and direct forms of communication, but also points to their formative role in later historical memory. The article has a dual focus: first it examines the notes sent between the Fatimid caliph and his chief minister, Jawdhar, before turning to explore the use of messaging during the Norman conquest of Sicily.

Keywords: Mediterranean, Sicily, Ifrīqiya, Fatimids, Kalbids, Jawdhar, Normans, medieval writing, letters, messages, notes, oral history, memory, chronicles

“AND GOD DISPERSED THEIR UNITY”: HISTORIOGRAPHICAL PATTERNS IN RECOUNTING THE END OF MUSLIM RULE IN SICILY AND AL-ANDALUS

ROBERTA DENARO

BETWEEN THE SECOND half of the eleventh and the early twelfth centuries, the crisis affecting the entire *dār al-Islām* (Islamic world), in particular the western Mediterranean, became evident. As the First Crusade got under way in the east (Jerusalem fell in 1099), in the west the Norman conquest of Sicily was complete with the capture of Palermo in 1072 and of Siracusa in 1086. In Muslim Spain, meanwhile, an unstoppable process of fragmentation began. The collapse of the Umayyad caliphate led to the emergence of several small kingdoms, militarily and politically weak and constantly warring with one another. The Christian kingdoms to the north took advantage of this discord in Andalusian Islam, laying the foundations for a military advance that was crowned in the early thirteenth century by the great victory of Alfonso VIII of Castile, Peter II of Aragon, and Sancho VII of Navarre at Las Navas de Tolosa, which slowly but inexorably led to the end of Muslim Spain.

An ample academic bibliography has explored and analyzed the features and causes of this crisis in Islamic political power in the Maghrib, and the new configurations born out of what was, in many ways, the end of an era.¹ But the crisis of the eleventh century also offers an opportunity to tackle an issue that has not been extensively studied: how Islamic historiography dealt with the themes of defeat, loss, and the complete disappearance of significant territories within the *dār-al-Islām*.

To contextualize this investigation, we should first underline three important aspects of this historiography. First, my analysis is based on the recognition that *history was a branch of literature*, which means that we must account for the strong narrative dimensions characteristic of Arabic non-fiction² and of historiography in

1 On the crisis in the central Mediterranean, see Brett, “Central Lands”; on the Norman conquest of Sicily, see Nef, *Conquérir et gouverner*, especially 1–63. On the end of the Umayyads in al-Andalus and the subsequent crisis, see Viguera-Molins, “Al-Andalus.”

2 For a ground-breaking survey, see *Story-Telling*. For model readings of historical texts as literary artifacts, see al-Azmeh, “Histoire et narration,” Leder, “Features of the Novel,” El-Hibri, *Reinterpreting Islamic Historiography*, and Shoshan, *Poetics of Islamic Historiography*.

particular, according to a relatively new perspective in scholarship on Islamic medieval historiography. For it is only over the last three decades that scholars have started to consider the medieval Islamic historian as possessing an authorial intention, rather than as a mere compiler or paraphraser of earlier works, and to read their works as literary products that reflect strategies of compilation, not as mere repositories of factual information. For this reason, aspects of Suzanne Fleischman's argument about the medieval distinction between history and fiction, even though partly superseded by more nuanced approaches, are not totally inapplicable to Arabo-Islamic historiography. Like that of medieval Christendom, it, too, was the product of "an age in which history is defined as collective belief" and in which "the boundary between history and fiction will at best be imprecise and one that is constantly shifting."³ Without venturing into the thorny debate over the reliability of our Islamic sources in the historical reconstruction of events,⁴ there is no doubt as to the "prominent role of the imagination in the construction of all historical narrative," the fact that these texts are "a branch, albeit a major branch, of literature."⁵

As this approach has been gaining ground in Islamic studies, attention has so far been focused mainly on the foundational events of the first Islamic community. Scholars have, for example, analyzed the topoi and narrative devices of the *sīra* and *maghāzī* (i.e. the historiography recounting the life of Muḥammad and the origins of the *Umma*) and that describing the phase of Islam's great territorial expansion.⁶ As a result, historiographical strategies for dealing with the theme of defeat have been relatively little discussed. This article therefore offers a preliminary analysis of some of the motifs that characterize histories devoted to the crisis of Islamic power in Sicily and Muslim Spain, which shed light on those strategies.

Second, I locate this study *at the antipodes of the futūḥāt*, the historiographical sub-genre⁷ devoted to the history of Islamic military expansion and recalling

³ Fleischman, "Representation of History," 306.

⁴ See Sizgorich, "Narrative and Community," 13–15; and Donner, *Narratives*, 1–31.

⁵ Fleischman, "Representation of History," 306. Among the vast literature on the issue, see White, "Historical Text," and *The Value of Narrativity*; Kempshall, *Rhetoric*; Canary and Kozicki, *The Writing of History*; Momigliano, *Rhetoric of History*; and Ginzburg, *History, Rhetoric, and Proof*. A more nuanced approach to Islamic historiography is proposed by Robinson, *Islamic Historiography*, 155.

⁶ For example, Noth and Conrad, *Early Arabic Historical Tradition*; Noth, "Fiktion"; Donner, *Narratives*; Little, "Narrative Themes"; al-Azmeh, *The Arabs and Islam*, 67–86; El-Hibri, *Parable and Politics*; Hirschler, *Medieval Arabic Historiography*; Keaney, *Medieval Islamic Historiography*; Hagler, "Shapers of Memory."

⁷ See Conrad, "Futūḥ"; Paret, "Legendary Futūḥ." The principal works of *futūḥ* (whether individual chapters or larger collections) are listed in Noth, *Early Arabic Historical Tradition*, 31–33. On the conquest as a historiographical theme, see Donner, *Narratives*, 174–82.

the events of the conquest period "as a series of monumental episodes that located contemporary Islam and its adherents within an overarching narrative of prophecy, revelation, and salvation."⁸ To evaluate the historiographical meaning and function of defeat, I consider whether, and to what extent, the dramatic events that Arab historians began to record in the early twelfth century can be seen as counterparts to those featured in the *futūḥāt*. The more generic problem is to identify into which overall vision of history the narrative of defeat is inserted—to quote Thomas Sizgorich, which (if any) "overarching narrative" was applied to the end of the *dār al-Islām* in Sicily and Spain.

Finally, we need to account for the fundamental *disparity* between the sources available for Sicily and for al-Andalus, above all the differing cultural, literary, and symbolic impact of the imagery produced by efforts to narrate the end of Islamic rule in these two territories. While sometimes associated with one another in Islamic sources,⁹ they are not treated with the same degree of rhetorical power, as attested by the overwhelming number of the surviving sources devoted to the loss of al-Andalus, compared to those regarding Sicily. This disparity is the result of many factors, including the discrepancy between the long era of Islamic rule in al-Andalus compared to that of Sicily.

The Precedents for Describing Defeat

In describing the early centuries of Islam, Arab historians had to report, alongside many victories, events ending in defeat: such as the death of the general 'Uqba b. Nāfi' at the hands of the Berber leader Kusayla in 683, the naval defeat by the Byzantines in 747, or the futile attempts to conquer Constantinople. In an ideal repertoire of such defeat narratives, the battle of Uḥud stands out as a key episode of "proto-defeat," from a symbolic as well as from a literary point of view.¹⁰ In 625, the Meccans defeated the first Islamic community led by Muḥammad: a debacle whose representation became the archetype for talking about later defeats suffered by the *Umma*. A rapid survey of the narratives dealing with Uḥud in three fundamental works of Muslim historiography (Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīra al-nabawiyya* 3:14–92; al-Wāqidī, *Kitāb al-maghāzī* 1:199–319; and al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh al-rusul*

⁸ Sizgorich, "Do Prophets Come with a Sword?" 993.

⁹ On the relationship between the Arabic culture of Sicily and that of al-Andalus (already observed by Amari, *Description de Palerme*, 4), see Gabrieli, "Arabi di Sicilia"; Rizzitano, "La Sicilia musulmana," 551–65; and, more recently, Mandalà, "Figlia d'al-Andalus!"; Kennedy, "Sicily and al-Andalus." On the artistic exchanges between medieval Arab Sicily and the Muslim west, see Kapitaikin, "The Daughter of al-Andalus."

¹⁰ Robinson, "Uḥud."

wa-l-mulūk 2:499–533)¹¹ shows that the accounts of the defeat are constructed largely through the accumulation of (1) narratives with Muḥammad as protagonist, (2) descriptions of duels and clashes between individual warriors,¹² and (3) lists recording those who died in battle on both sides (as is always the case in texts of this type).¹³ Taken as a whole, albeit with differences of tone, these texts ascribe the defeat less to the greater tactical skill of the enemy than to the division and confusion reigning among Muslims. The desire for spoils (the “goods of this world”)¹⁴ and disobedience toward the Prophet (and thus toward God) underlie a defeat described as a “catastrophe which befell the Muslims” (*mā aṣāba-hum min al-balāʾ*).¹⁵

While, in al-Ṭabarī’s text, the connection between disobedience and defeat remains implicit, in Ibn Hishām there is an even clearer relationship between them¹⁶ and the theme of defeat emerges as a trial or a test (*balāʾ* or *fitna*).¹⁷ “The day of Uḥud was a day of trial (*balāʾ*), calamity (*muṣība*), and heart-searching (*tamḥiṣ*), on which God tested the believers and put the hypocrites on trial (*wa-maḥana bi-hi al-munāfiqīna*), those who professed faith with their tongues and hid unbelief in their hearts.”¹⁸ Defeat thus provides the perfect opportunity to test believers before they enter Paradise and is the principal route of access to it.¹⁹ Alongside this theme, amply represented in the exegesis of Qurʾān 3:140 (traditionally referred to Uḥud),²⁰ we find that of defeat as a result of God’s absence from the battlefield. For just as victory is granted by God (*mā al-naṣr illā min ʿinda Allāh*),²¹ so defeat

11 Unless expressly otherwise stated, the texts are quoted according to the following translations: Guillaume, *Life of Muhammad*, 370–426 (*Sīra*); Faizer, *Life of Muhammad*, 99–162 (*Maghāzī*); *History of al-Ṭabarī* (Montgomery Watt), 7:105–38 (*Taʾrīkh*). For the other Arabic texts, unless otherwise stated, the translations are my own.

12 See *Maghāzī*, 1:215–18; *Sīra*, 3:45, 48 etc.; *Taʾrīkh*, 2:509 (Alī’s duel with the polytheist’s standard-bearer); 2:517 (death of Ḥamza b. ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib).

13 See *Maghāzī*, 1:300–307 (Muslims killed at Uḥud); 307–19 (Polytheists) and *Sīra*, 3:59–63.

14 See *Taʾrīkh*, 2:514, 515.

15 *Taʾrīkh*, 2:514.

16 See *Sīra*, 3:20, 23.

17 See Nawas, “Trial”; and Gardet, “Fitna.” On *fitna* as a historiographical theme see Noth, *Early Arabic Historical Tradition*, 33–35; and Donner, *Narratives*, 184–90. On the paradigmatic role of Uḥud as a warning against *fitna*, see Robinson, “Uḥud,” 844.

18 *Sīra*, 3:24.

19 *Sīra*, 3:21.

20 For a survey of the qur’anic exegesis, see Robinson, “Uḥud,” 844. On the exegesis of Qurʾān 3:140, see Denaro, *Dal martire allo ṣahīd*, 71–75.

21 *Sīra*, 3:48.

is a tangible sign of disobedience and divisions among Muslims.²² Uḥud is therefore the direct opposite of Badr, the first victorious battle of the Muslims,²³ when angelic presences flocked to help them. In the words of Ibn Hishām, "the angels did not fight the day of Uḥud."²⁴

In al-Wāqidi's history, the theme of defeat as resulting from disobedience and internal divisions is further developed, almost to the extent of denying defeat itself. After a warning speech by the Prophet,²⁵ who explicitly describes Uḥud as an admonition against *fitna* (temptation, trial, sedition), the battle is described as a "failed victory." "God never granted such a victory (*ẓaffara*) on a field to his Prophet as He granted him and his companions the day of Uḥud, until they disobeyed the Prophet and disputed his command (*ḥattā 'aṣū al-rasūl wa-tanāza'ū fī al-amr*)."²⁶ As in many other narratives of jihād,²⁷ we also find the formula of the two good things (*al-ḥusnayānī*): spoils in the event of victory or martyrdom in the event of defeat.

It could be said that historical narratives employ two different perspectives to describe defeat. To put it in cinematographic terms, Arab historians switch from an extreme long shot, of armies or peoples/nations as a whole, to a tight close-up that encapsulates the general defeat through the death of a single *mujāhid* on the battlefield. As their narratives move from a collective to an individual perspective, the focus on defeat changes. While the defeat of an entire community requires a complex and sometimes contradictory interpretative framework (as we will see below), individual defeat is invariably modelled as a narrative of martyrdom—and therefore of victory on a higher plane. To simplify, we could say that the individual combatant is faced with a "win-win situation," in which victory results in *ghanīma*

22 On the "God-centred model of history" featured in Islamic (and medieval Christian) historiography, see Robinson, *Islamic Historiography*, 124–42.

23 The battle of Badr, fought in the second year after Muḥammad's emigration from Mecca to Medina (624), features as a foundational victory in the Muslim historiographic tradition. It reassured Muḥammad and the *Umma* of the righteousness of their cause and laid the basis for a new hierarchy among the believers, distinguishing those who had fought at Badr from those who stayed at Medina. See Nawas, "Badr," and Denaro, "Narratives of Jihād."

24 *Maghāzī*, 1:235.

25 He is reported to have said: "the differences (*al-ikhtilāfāt*), the controversy (*al-tanāzu'*), and the frustrations (*al-tathbīt*) belong to the category of the weak and impotent and is not what God desires, and He will not grant it victory or success (*wa-lā yu'ṭī 'alay-hi al-naṣr wa-lā al-ẓafar*)."²⁶ *Maghāzī*, 1:222.

26 *Maghāzī*, 1:229. The same concept also appears in al-Ṭabarī's account, where it is said that "God sent down his victory ... There was no doubt about the defeat the Muslims had inflicted on the Meccans" (2:513).

27 See, for example, the reply of an Arab prisoner to Rustām in al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, 1:254–55. On this theme see also Donner, *Narratives*, 177–78.

(booty, spoils) and defeat in this world (with its extreme outcome of death) is reformulated as a *shahāda* (martyrdom), victory in the Other world. In the words of a companion of the Prophet before the battle of Uḥud: "O Messenger of God, it is one of the two good results. Either martyrdom or plunder and victory in killing them."²⁸

The Theme of Defeat in the Sources for Sicily and al-Andalus

The battle of Poitiers (732) provides an ideal opportunity to analyze the theme of defeat in a specifically "Andalusian" context. However, this skirmish became a "decisive battle" only in the later rewritings of European historians, from the Bollandists in the sixteenth century, who interpreted Poitiers as a miracle, to the historians of the eighteenth century onwards, who emphasized the significance of the battle as a struggle between East and West, the Qur'ān and the Gospel.²⁹ Arabic sources provide little information about the battle, considered to be a minor incident in which the Frankish warlord Charles Martel defeated the governor of al-Andalus, 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. 'Abd Allāh al-Ghāfiqī. At any rate, it is worth noting that the few available accounts from the eleventh century onward feature the usual interpretation of defeat as martyrdom and refer to the battle of Poitiers as the *ghazwa* of the *balāṭ al-shuhadā'*: the "expedition" of "the pavement of martyrs."³⁰ Nor can we rule out the presence, in this case too, of the theme of "failed victory." According to some versions, after the initial victory of the Berber cavalry, the Muslim army fell apart when the combatants abandoned their positions. Seeing the Franks making for their enemies' camp, they ran to protect their spoils, thus ensuring the victory of the Christian army.³¹

The theme of the "failed victory" certainly deserves to be included in the repertoire of themes employed in Islamic narratives of defeat, but to what extent was it inscribed in Arabic historiography's narratives of crisis in both Sicily and al-Andalus? A key moment in the decline of the latter is said to have been brought about by the internal struggles that followed the collapse of the Umayyad caliphate, described by Arab historians as concluding in the *tā'ifa* "band, party, faction" period. Here, the word refers to a phenomenon specifically connected

²⁸ "Yā rasūl Allāh, hiya iḥdā al-ḥusnayayni, immā al-shahāda wa-immā al-ghanīma wa-l-zafar fī qatli-him." *Maghāzī*, 1:213.

²⁹ See Mercier and Seguin, *Charles Martel*.

³⁰ See Pérès, "Balāṭ al-ṣuhadā'"; Nicolle, *Poitiers* (I have used the Italian translation, *La battaglia di Poitiers*, 105–32). The Arabic sources on the battle are collected in *History of Mohammedan Dynasties*, 2:33, 37.

³¹ See Nicolle, *La battaglia*, 113, 118–19.

to the history of Islam in al-Andalus, where it was also used to describe *mulūk al-ṭawā'if* or small, local dynasties of rulers. The same term is later used by the Mamluk historian al-Nuwayrī (d. 1332), and applied to Muslim history in Sicily.³² This appears to suggest, on the one hand, that the concept of "taifization" had attained the status of historiographical category and, on the other, that the decline of both Sicily and al-Andalus were seen as comparable.

Moreover, when al-Nuwayrī considers the final part of the history of Muslim Sicily and al-Andalus as the ultimate tragic outcome of a major historical process, he does so from a perspective inaugurated in the late eleventh century by 'Alī ibn Ṭāhir al-Sulamī (d. 1107).³³ In his *Kitāb al-Jihād*, this Damascene jurist was precociously aware that a new political and military epoch was beginning, and he noted a connection among the various Christian military offensives directed against the Muslim states.

A host [of Franks] swooped down upon the island of Sicily at a time of division and dissension among its people, and likewise they took possession of town after town in al-Andalus. When reports mutually confirmed the condition of this country [Syria] — namely, the disagreements of its lords (*ikhtilāf arbābi-hā*), the oppressive demands of its leading men, together with its disorder and disarray — they acted upon their decision to set out for it [Syria], and Jerusalem was the chief object of their desires. When they arrived in Syria, they saw divided sovereignties, conflicting opinions, and contending views (*mamālik muftariqa wa-qulūb ghayr muttafiqa wa-arā' mutabāyina*), combined with hidden enmity, so that their ambitions expanded accordingly and extended to whatever their power could command.³⁴

In al-Sulamī's account, the political and military crisis engendered by these divisions is then described as a spiritual crisis, a result of the religious laxity into which Muslims had fallen.

The discontinuation [of jihād], coupled with the disregard by Muslims of the obligatory requirements [of their faith], as well as the annulling of its prohibitions, has had the inevitable result that God has shattered their unity, 'created dissension in their ranks, cast enmity and hatred' (Qur'ān 5: 64)

³² al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-arab*, 24:378.

³³ For a bibliographical review, see Christie, "'Alī ibn Ṭāhir al-Sulamī"; Sivan, "La genèse"; Chevedden, "View of the Crusades," especially 289–99.

³⁴ The Arabic text is in Sivan, "La genèse," 207; the English translation is in Chevedden, "View of the Crusades," 290. Sicily and al-Andalus also appear to be the target of the Franks in Ibn al-Athīr's text (see Mandalā, "Figlia d'al-Andalus!," 39–40).

among them [the Muslims], and incited their enemies to seize their territories, thus allowing their enemies to recover from them whatever they desire.³⁵

Here, it must be noted how closely his vision mirrors that of his contemporary Pope Urban II, with the roles reversed: “they both [al-Sulamī and Pope Urban II] see the actions of foreign conquerors as the instruments of divine vengeance against the sins of the faithful — the means by which God responds to sins and prevents the increase of evil. They both accept history as a continuous manifestation of God’s providence, and they see God’s power manifesting itself in Sicily, in Spain, and in Syria.”³⁶

More importantly, however, al-Sulamī’s approach is consistent with the metahistorical vision that underlies the literature of the *futūḥāt* and shapes its recurrent themes. Just as victory goes to the community that, according to a famous topos, is composed of “monks by night and warriors by day,”³⁷ defeat, correspondingly and antithetically, results from the *Umma*’s lack of cohesion and the diminution of its religious fervour, evidenced above all by the weakening of its commitment to jihād. The response to the crisis, according to al-Sulamī, can thus come only from a “réarmement morale.”

This vision of defeat as principally a moral failing of the *Umma* is apparent in various “narratives of the end” (or of the preceding crisis) of al-Andalus and of Sicily. The same sense of moral failing is echoed in the harsh judgment on Muslim Sicily expressed by the chronicler and geographer Ibn Ḥawqal (tenth century) in his denigrating portrait of Palermo inhabitants who prefer to become school teachers rather than *mujāhid*.³⁸ The sultan of Granada, Yūsuf I, exhorts his people to a similar moral and spiritual reaction³⁹ in an oration redacted for him by the celebrated belletrist Ibn al-Khaṭīb (d. 1375).⁴⁰

Awaken then from the sleep into which you have fallen! Gather up your scattered aspirations! Prepare to face the thunder and lightning of

³⁵ Text in Sivan, “La genèse,” 207; translation in Chevedden, “View of the Crusades,” 292.

³⁶ Chevedden, “View of the Crusades,” 291. On the shared sense of history in Islamic and Christian medieval historiography, see also Robinson, *Islamic Historiography*, 130.

³⁷ On this theme, see Sizgorich, “Sanctified Violence,” 906–14.

³⁸ Ibn Ḥawqal, *Bibliotheca Geographorum Arabicorum*, 2:126.

³⁹ A similar call for a reaction against Christians, together with the idea that the disaster is a punishment for the sins of Muslims, also appears in three literary texts on the fall of Barbastro (1064), cf. Marín, “Crusaders in the Muslim West.”

⁴⁰ On him see Knysh, “Ibn al-Khaṭīb.”

misfortune [...] Since the Great Leader of Christianity [...] has launched against Islam a nation with a fleet overflowing as rainfall [...] He has thus ordered those of his religion to unite in numbers and to all attack this small rearguard, foreign, as if the Hour (of Judgement) had sounded.⁴¹

Calls to the unity of the *Umma* in the face of its imminent end, and invitations to jihād as a manifestation of profoundly experienced faith, abound in the prose of Ibn al-Khaṭīb. This is unsurprising, since such oratorical themes are particularly suited to his career as the minister of the Naṣrids of Granada and the author of official letters and *khuṭab jihādiyya*: sermons inciting to jihād.⁴² In this literary subgenre, to a greater extent than elsewhere, we find a rhetoric based on a metahistorical vision of the end, underpinned by apocalyptic implications.⁴³

So grasp the last spark of life of the religion before it passes away! Rush to the ailing Islam before it dies! Preserve your faces with God on the day when He shall ask you about His worshippers! Exert yourselves for God with your tongues and your wealth in the righteous duty of His jihād!⁴⁴

This approach, focusing on the declining *pietas* of the Muslims as the main cause of their defeat, is also fully in keeping with the construction (religious, literary, and symbolic) of al-Andalus and Sicily as *thaghr*, belligerent frontiers.⁴⁵ These narratives, when developed around the theme of waning jihād, draw strength from the frontier rhetoric that is particularly persistent in the case of al-Andalus. An example from the late fourteenth century is the treatise written by Ibn Hudhayl (d. ca. 1409) at the request of the sultan of Granada, who was increasingly under pressure from the Christian kingdoms.

⁴¹ al-Maqqarī, *Nafh*, 6:183–84.

⁴² Ibn al-Khaṭīb composed two jihād orations (edited and translated by Remiro in his "Correspondencia," 367–85). The texts preserved in al-Maqqarī's account (*Azhār al-riyāḍ*, 1:64–65), however, do not perfectly correspond to the *khuṭbas* collected by Remiro: see Jones, *Power of Oratory*, 149–50.

⁴³ It is not uncommon for texts narrating the end of Islamic rule to echo earlier writings on *malāḥim*, such as the *Kitāb al-fitan* by Nu'aym ibn Ḥammād (recently translated by David Cook). On this issue, see Ann Christys, "From Ġihād to Dīwān," 92–93; Fierro, "Doctrinas y movimientos"; Fierro and Faghia, "Un nuevo texto"; Stearns, "Representing and Remembering," 364–66.

⁴⁴ al-Maqqarī, *Azhār al-riyāḍ*, 1:65; Jones, *Power of Oratory*, 153.

⁴⁵ On the term, see Bosworth and Latham, "al-Thughur"; Brauer, "Boundaries and Frontiers," 12–25. On the promotion of jihād on the frontier of al-Andalus, see Manzano, *La frontera*. See also Bosch-Vilà, "Algunas consideraciones." On the representations of Sicily as *thaghr* (frontier), regardless of the ruling dynasty, see Pellitteri, *I Fatimidi*.

The peninsula of al-Andalus is the purest ground, whose surface shines like a face. It has come, thanks to martyrdom (*faḍl al-shahāda*), to be populated by Muslims living and dead. Its history is extraordinary and superior to that of all other countries. Is it not perhaps squeezed between an ocean and a well-armed enemy that dogs its inhabitants night and day?⁴⁶

In short, the theme of moral and religious crisis emerges as one of the principal forms for narrating defeat. Moreover, the rhetoric of the frontier, applied to both Sicily and al-Andalus, provides reasons for defeat just as previously it had supplied reasons for victory: underlying the crisis are discord among Muslims and the decline of the commitment to jihād in areas that were once its chosen land.

This view is emphasized by the employment and inversion of some recurrent motifs in the historiography of the *futūḥāt*: for example, the *vaticinium ex eventu* put into the mouth of the commander of the Franks, Qāruluh (Charles Martel):

God has granted to Mūsā b. Nuṣayr [the Umayyad general who directed the Islamic conquest of Hispania] a victory that could not be greater. Indeed, the Christian kings yielded to him to the extent that Mūsā was able to attack the pass of al-Andalus which stands on the mountain between al-Andalus and the Great Land [i.e. Gaul]; the Franks gathered around their great king Qāruluh (this is what they call their king) and said to him: "What is this shame that will linger on our children? We had heard of the Arabs [...] that they were few in number and had no weapons." He answered them, "It is my opinion that you should not resist them in this attack, because [now] they are like a river that carries off anyone who stands in its way and what they do is successful, their determination is heightened by the conflict with a numerous enemy and their hearts are reinvigorated against what is well defended. But give them the time to fill their hands with booty, to choose houses for themselves and to fight each other."⁴⁷

Here, the same narrative device recurrent in the historiography on conquests is voiced by a vanquished enemy and thus validated by his external, objective perspective. The words of Charles/Qāruluh serve to contrast two moments on a historical trajectory.

On the one hand, we see a victorious Islam, pure in its intentions and determined in jihād, represented by the poorly armed and numerically inferior

⁴⁶ Ibn Hudhayl, *Tuhfat al-anfus*, in Mercier, *L'ornement des âmes*, 10.

⁴⁷ al-Maqqarī, *Nafh*, 1:274–75.

Arabs, in accordance with a topos typical of the *futūḥāt*.⁴⁸ On the other, we have a defeated Islam, weakened by luxuries and internally divided, in accordance with a topos previously applied by historians to describe the two great defeated imperial powers, the Persians and the Byzantines. The theme of corrupting luxury, of the hunger for spoils⁴⁹ (already at work in the chronicle of Uḥud and in the *ghazwa balāṭ al-shuhadāʾ*) foretell the *fitna* and inevitable defeat. Indeed, the prophecy of the defeated king comes true: "This was exactly what happened as a result of the *fitna* that broke out among the Syrians, the Baladis, the Berbers, the Arabs of the Mudar, and the Yemenis."⁵⁰

Cherchez la femme: Some Observations on a Flexible Motif

However, writing the "history of the end" cannot be reduced to a single interpretive framework. Readings of crisis grounded in a broad geopolitical vision and/or on the transposition of this crisis into a spiritual and metahistorical plane are not the only ways of tackling the theme. They may intersect with other narratives of defeat which, corresponding to another more "secular" approach, are built up through an accumulation of anecdotes representative of the historical process as a whole. This is one of the basic forms of Muslim historiography, the *khavar*: a particular episode that serves to describe and explain complex historical dynamics, thanks to the immediate comprehensibility of individual events, often modelled on a clearly narrative pattern.⁵¹ The above-mentioned theme of discord (*fitna*), which is still the overarching reference for the various narratives of the crisis, now unfolds within an event-based view of history.

Among the various *khavars* which build an *histoire événementielle* of defeat, the "causative trope of kidnapped and dishonored women as a provocation to, or excuse for, warfare"⁵² stands as particularly significant. This is a very widespread and transcultural pattern which cannot be extensively dealt with here, and its occurrence within an ideal repertoire of the themes of defeat (still largely under construction) provides a convenient explanation for almost all kinds of abrupt and violent changes, whether it be an invasion, a dynastic replacement, an uprising or, as in this case, the end of the *dār al-Islām* in Sicily and al-Andalus. It is not surprising, therefore, to find

⁴⁸ Denaro, "Narratives of Jihād," 8–10.

⁴⁹ On the theme of the conquerors of al-Andalus seizing too much booty, see also Christys, "From Ġihād to Dīwān," 90–92.

⁵⁰ al-Maqqarī, *Nafh*, 1:275.

⁵¹ Rosenthal, *A History*, 66–71.

⁵² Clarke, *Muslim Conquest of Iberia*, 108.

narratives featuring a woman responsible for triggering a conflict and the resulting defeat, deliberately or otherwise. As Maribel Fierro has observed,

[n]arratives of violence against women in medieval writings—still a much unexplored topic, especially as regards the Islamic world—appear, as indicated by Manuela Marín, in contexts dealing with the relationships linking women in a hierarchy of power to their husbands or masters, and also in those of social disorder (wars and armed conflicts). These last narratives may serve a function similar to that of other cases of violence in such contexts, the de-legitimisation of those who perpetrated it.⁵³

The theme of *fitna* as originating in an act of violence against a woman is adopted both at the beginning and end of narratives describing the Muslim presence on the island of Sicily: a female character paves the way for Arab conquest, and it is again a woman who precipitates the Norman invasion.

According to a story reported in various detailed versions by Greek sources and (in a more concise way) by Arabic sources,⁵⁴ the conquest of Byzantine Sicily was facilitated by a civil war that broke out among Christians after the kidnapping of Homoniza, a high-born nun, by the island's naval commander Euphemius (or Efthymios).⁵⁵ When the nun's brothers asked the emperor to punish Euphemius/Efthymios, the latter escaped to Ifrīqiya, where he took refuge with the Aghlabid emir Ziyādat Allāh. In exchange for the support of the Aghlabids, the Byzantine exile proposes that Ziyādat Allāh conquer Sicily and make it a tributary province. This account, regardless of its much-debated historical accuracy,⁵⁶ exhibits elements shared by the Arabic historiography of al-Andalus.⁵⁷ According to these accounts, the Arabs were summoned to Spain by Ilyān/Julian,⁵⁸ lord of Ceuta and

53 Fierro, "Violence against Women," 155–56.

54 The different versions of the story are in Amari, *Storia dei musulmani*, 1:367–81. The Arabic sources on Euthymius (Fīmī) are collected in Amari, *Appendice alla Biblioteca arabosicula*, 221–23 (Ibn al-Athīr); *BAS*, 433–39 (al-Nuwayrī), and *BAS*, 466 (Ibn Khaldūn).

55 On the name, see Prigent (who favours Euphemius), "La carrière du toumarque Euphēmios"; for a different view (Euthymius), see Gil, "Sicily," 97.

56 On the factual aspects of the story, see Prigent, "La carrière du toumarque Euphēmios," 298–300.

57 See Rizzitano, "La Sicilia musulmana," 551–52. This is not the only legendary motif shared by al-Andalus and Sicily: Clarke points to an account (dating to after the eleventh century *fitna* and Berber invasion of al-Andalus) featuring a statue built to protect against the Berbers, fairly similar to another legend associated with Sicily: see Clarke, *Muslim Conquest of Iberia*, 76–77.

58 On his name, also reported as Ulyān/Wulyān or Bulyān, and his confessional identity, see Roth, "The Jews and the Muslim Conquest," 147–48.

enemy of Roderico, the Visigothic king. Ilyān's "beautiful and pure" daughter, living at the king's court, has been raped by Roderico: Ilyān, therefore, seeks the help of the Arabs. "So, there can be no doubt that the injury done to Ilyān's daughter was one of the causes of the conquest of al-Andalus, subordinate to what God Almighty had decreed about it,"⁵⁹ concludes the Arab historian.

Similar stories, though with roles reversed, are used to describe the end of Islamic power in Sicily and in al-Andalus. In Sicily, the end of the Kalbids' rule and the Norman invasion are associated with the story of Ibn al-Thumna, the lord of Syracuse,⁶⁰ who attempts to kill his wife, Maymūna. She survives and manages to return to her brother, Ibn al-Ḥawwās, the lord of Girgenti, Castrogiovanni, and Castronovo, who refuses to send her back to her husband and eventually defeats Ibn al-Thumna in battle. Ibn al-Thumna then turns to Rujjār al-Faranjī (Roger I), offering him control of the island.⁶¹ In the case of al-Andalus, we find stories partially modelled on this narrative pattern to explain the succession of dynasties in Morocco and Spain. Their purpose is to provide an aetiology for events that fall into the category of *fitna*, supported by its instantly recognizable association with women.⁶² The story of Ibn Hūd, *taifa* emir of Murcia and leader of an uprising against the Almohads in 1228, seems to correspond in many respects to such a typology. According to Arab historians, Ibn Hūd entrusts his mistress—or rather, according to Ibn al-Khaṭīb, the Christian prisoner with whom he is in love—to his vizier Ibn al-Ramimī, who seduces her. Fearing discovery, because the woman is pregnant, the vizier kills Ibn Hūd and replaces him as lord of Almeria.⁶³

Preliminary Conclusions

On the basis of this initial overview, various historiographical strategies emerge, aimed at describing the crisis that struck the Islamic western Mediterranean starting from the eleventh century. The first is to represent defeat as a tangible manifestation of moral and spiritual crisis. The historical events thus become both

⁵⁹ al-Maqqarī, *Nafh*, 1:251–52 (*History of Mohammedan Dynasties*, 1:256); and Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam, *Futūḥ Miṣr*, 205.

⁶⁰ On him see Rizzitano, "Ibn al-Thumna."

⁶¹ Amari, *Appendice alla Biblioteca arabo-sicula*, 275–76.

⁶² The semantic field of *fitna* also covers "temptation, attractiveness, fascination." *Khabars* modelled on this topos warn against the tricks and temptations represented by women, as in the many *ḥadīths* stating that the Prophet said, "I have not left behind to the people who will follow me a more harmful temptation to men than women" and "be on guard against women. For the discord (*fitna*) among the Children of Israel began through women." See al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat*, 2:64–65 (trans. Muhanna).

⁶³ See *History of Mohammedan Dynasties*, 2:337.

a warning and a stimulus for the *Umma*, especially when the historical narrative is employed to mobilize Muslims and framed as a *khutba jihādiyya*. This strategy, operating on the same level as much late antique and medieval Christian historiography,⁶⁴ engages typical motifs from the historiography of *futūḥāt*. Among the many works recounting the end of Islam in Sicily and al-Andalus, there is a strong narrative component that describes the crisis by employing and reversing the patterns frequently found in narratives of victory. These are themes of decadence (luxury, hunger for material goods, weakening commitment to jihād) that employ the rhetoric of the frontier and emphasize the spiritual benefits that derive from jihād and *ribāṭ* (a frontier outpost for the defence of Islam). These themes require further investigation to verify the extent to which they are present in the sources and, above all, their connection with an eschatological reading of defeat, which the sources considered here do not make explicit but which can nonetheless be intuited.

A second strategy in the historiography of defeat, as related to Sicily and al-Andalus, could be defined as more “secular.” This strategy represents the crisis as the consequence of a specific event, generally an aetiological anecdote. In the accounts examined above, political events (taking the most dramatic form of wars, invasions, dynastic changes etc.) are connected to female figures who, deliberately or otherwise, catalyze the next phase of the historical process. This is effectively exemplified by Homoniza; Ilyān’s daughter, Maymūna; and (with some distinctions) Ibn Hūd’s mistress. However, alongside these features shared by accounts of Sicily and al-Andalus, other characteristic elements suggest a significant divergence. The most marked of these is the disparity between the available sources on Sicily and al-Andalus, which means that the narratives of defeat and the end of the *dār al-Islām* in these two territories have an unequal impact. While Muslim historians describe al-Andalus as “a place of wonders, a land of jihād, with a close link to the end of days,”⁶⁵ the same is true of Sicily only to a limited extent. From this point of view, al-Andalus obviously provides a very suitable model for the “narrative of the end” par excellence.⁶⁶

It is also worth considering the features that differentiate the prose tradition from that of verse. In both al-Andalus and Sicily, the prose sources devote

64 On the explanation of the Muslim conquest in Christian sources see Villagomez, “Christian Salvation”; Sizgorich, “Narrative and Community”; Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, especially 523–35; Samir Khalil, “L’Apocalypse de Samuel,” especially 38–39.

65 Stearns, “Representing and Remembering,” 369.

66 See Robinson, “Ubi Sunt”; Granara, “Nostalgia”; Shannon, “There and Back Again”; Ebied and Young, “Abū-l-Baqā’ al-Rundī”; Stearns, “Representing and Remembering.” On the role of the historiography of Arab Sicily in modern Italian culture, see Mallette, “I nostri Saracini.”

less space to that "device of nostalgia": that is, in contrast to the principal interpretative category in poetry,⁶⁷ which was the prevalent model for the narrative of the end. From this perspective, a systematic investigation of how the historiography of endings relates to the very rich poetic tradition on the same theme might yield interesting results. The final difference concerns Arabo-Islamic historiography more generally, and currently remains a research hypothesis. The sources examined here allow us to draw some provisional conclusions about the ways in which Arab historiography deals with the problem of defeat. As such, the principal instrument for measuring the forms taken by narratives of the end is a comparison with the model represented by the narratives of victory in the *sīra* and *maghāzī*, and in the historiography of conquest. A comparison with other narratives of defeat may be helpful in identifying the specificities and potential differences between al-Andalus and Sicily in this regard. While we can identify models in the archetypical defeats of the past, especially when these are mythical, as in the case of Uḥud, the other observation point is inevitably the capture of Baghdād by the Mongols.⁶⁸ The latter is an unavoidable reference point for attempting to answer my basic question as to how to narrate the catastrophe, how to give it a meaning.⁶⁹ This article represents a first step in the effort to trace a more systematic "discourse of defeat" in Arabo-Islamic historiography.

⁶⁷ Granara, "Ibn Ḥamdīs."

⁶⁸ See, for example, Gilli-Elewy, "Al-Ḥawādīṭ al-ḡāmi'a."

⁶⁹ See Capezzone, "Rovine." On the Islamic explanation of the Mongol invasion, see also May, "The Mongols as the Scourge of God."

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Abstract This article focuses on the different strategies adopted by Muslim historians to cope with the crises that struck the western Islamic Mediterranean between the eleventh and the twelfth centuries, focusing especially on narratives of defeat related to Sicily and al-Andalus. It examines the extent to which these narratives evoke the battle of Uḥud, taken as the archetypal narrative of defeat, and how they feature, in a reversed fashion, motifs peculiar to the narratives of *futūḥāt* (early Islamic conquests). Finally, the article considers some historical anecdotes that attribute a key role in accounts of discord—and the subsequent defeat—to the abuse of a female power: a topos well-attested across many cultures.

Keywords: Muslim historiography, medieval Arabic literature, narratives of defeat, Sicily, al-Andalus, *fitna*

A WONDROUS PAST, A DANGEROUS PRESENT: THE EGYPTIAN TEMPLE OF AKHMĪM AND THE MARTORANA CHURCH IN PALERMO, AS SEEN THROUGH IBN JUBAYR'S TRAVELOGUE

GIOVANNA CALASSO

THE END OF the twelfth century was without any doubt an age of turmoil in the Mediterranean region. During this period, Ibn Jubayr (1145–1217)—the renowned Muslim author from al-Andalus, whose travelogue, the *Rihla*, would become a paradigm of this literary genre—made his pilgrimage to Mecca. It had been a century since the First Crusade (1096–1099), and Latin Christians were still settled in Jerusalem as well as in the most important Syrian coastal towns. Meanwhile, in the Maghrib, the Berber dynasty of the Almohads (1147–1269) were countering the “Reconquista” by bringing the jihād from western Africa to the Iberian Peninsula, after having extended its dominion from Morocco to as far as Tripolitania. As for Egypt, about ten years before Ibn Jubayr’s departure from Granada in 1183, the Sunnī sultans of the Ayyubid lineage, under Saladin (Ṣalāḥ al-dīn, 1138–1193), had put an end to the rule of the Ismā‘īlī Fatimids who had been the powerful heterodox competitors of the Abbasid caliphs since the early tenth century. Yet, in spite of Saladin’s attempt to revive Egypt’s naval power,¹ and the continued strength of the Almohads’ fleet, navigation in the Mediterranean was no longer under Muslim control, but that of Italian maritime republics.² Sicily, after more than two hundred years of Muslim rule, had been conquered by the Normans and, after 1130, was the centre of their Italian kingdom.³

All of these events, here summarized in a few lines, entailed great changes at every level within the Muslim societies of the Mediterranean. First, they were affected by the ongoing political fragmentation of the Abbasid caliphs’ empire and its subsequent collapse during the tenth century. Then, as a consequence of the First Crusade, they experienced, for the first time—in limited but significant parts of their own territories—the condition of being subject to enemies of a different religion, language, and geographical and cultural origin: the Franks, *al-Ifranġ*. No

¹ For a synthetic, yet accurate, outline of the naval policies of Muslim leaders in the period 1100–1174, see Hillenbrand, *Crusades*, 564–71.

² The importance of the Mediterranean maritime space under the Almohads is particularly emphasized in the recent study by Picard, *La mer*, 206–16.

³ See Metcalfe, *Muslims of Medieval Italy*, 141–60.

less traumatic were the religious and political rifts emerging within Islam, beginning with the ascent to power of the Fatimids,⁴ who belonged to the Ismāʿīlī branch of Shiʿism and who proclaimed themselves caliphs in North Africa thanks to the success of their proselytizing campaign among “the Berbers,” *al-barbar* (as the Arabs called them) and their military support. More precisely, it was the Kutama Berbers who played a decisive role in the rise of the Fatimids in early tenth-century Ifrīqiya (present-day Tunisia) and in their subsequent conquest of Egypt. Other Berber tribes—the Sanhaja and Masmuda—would spearhead their own religious reform movements between the eleventh and the twelfth centuries, giving rise to new dynastic empires: the Almoravid and the Almohad.

The ways that Sunnī authors conceptualized the Muslim world and its Others was also affected by these upheavals. The binary categorization of *dār al-islām* and *dār al-ḥarb/al-kufr*, “the abode of Islam” and “the abode of war/unbelief” had been devised by Muslim jurists of the first Abbasid period⁵ as a pair of abstract legal categories within the framework of a unitary imperial reality; it would persist over time, its terms intact, although the meaning of those terms would be constantly renegotiated in response to historical challenges.⁶ Starting in the tenth century, however, eastern Muslim geographers recognized and rendered visible different identities *within* the world of Islam. While they made constant reference to the all-embracing notion of the *mamlakat al-islām*, “the realm of Islam”—as they called the territorial extent of Muslim rule in the mid-tenth century—they themselves identified a division, within the *mamlaka*, between Mashriq and Maghrib: the East and the West.⁷ Yet the shifting balance of power in the Mediterranean, in favour of Latin Christians, prompted further changes in the outlook of Muslim authors after the end of the eleventh century.

All of this can be perceived in Ibn Jubayr’s *Riḥla*. Alongside the heightened perception of Islam’s internal boundaries, there also emerged a strong need to affirm one’s belonging within a unitary world, one recognizable by certain common features in the whole expanse of its territories, and a concomitant need to enhance its image by appropriating its most visible and prestigious past, pre-eminently symbolized by imposing monuments. The *Riḥla* exemplifies how the great changes

4 See Brett, *Rise of the Fatimids*.

5 It was in the late eighth and early ninth centuries that authors such as Abū Yūsuf and Shaybānī started systematically using this binary in their works.

6 For recent research on this binary categorization, see *Dār al-islām/dār al-ḥarb*. On how the notions of *dār al-islām* and *dār al-ḥarb* were subject to reinterpretation by Muslim jurists, in particular from the end of the twelfth century when vast Muslim populations had come under non-Muslim rule, see el-Fadl, “Islamic Law,” 153–64.

7 This topic is the subject of my forthcoming article: Calasso, “Constructing the Boundary.”

and re-categorizations sketched above were represented, and indeed reflected in the way the author structured his travelogue. First, they are revealed by the author's emphasis on the division of the Islamic world into Mashriq and Maghrib, despite the systematic way in which he enumerates, describes, and even measures the buildings that represent the unitary imprint of Islam on the urban landscape.⁸ Second, they appear in the author's different attitudes toward ancient and contemporaneous Others, which can be read between the lines in his treatment of two significant non-Muslim religious buildings: the Egyptian temple of Akhmīm and the Church of St. Mary of the Admiral (also known as the Martorana) in Palermo. All of these narrative elements are intertwined with the turmoil and transformations begun in the tenth century and ongoing in Ibn Jubayr's lifetime.

The Division between Mashriq and Maghrib: From Eastern Tenth-Century Geographers to Ibn Jubayr's *Rihla*

While the internal division of the Muslim world into Mashriq and Maghrib gained visibility in the tenth century, thanks to the observations of eastern geographers, eastern historians almost completely ignored that part of the Islamic world called *al-Maghrib*, roughly the region west of Egypt. Ibn al-Athīr (1160–1233), a contemporary of the Almohads, would be the first to devote considerable attention to North Africa and al-Andalus in long sections of his ambitious world history.⁹ In contrast to contemporary historians, the tenth-century geographers whose careers coincided with the Fatimids' rise realized that there was a reality west of Egypt which could not be ignored. Although these geographers manifestly put the East at the centre of their mental universe, they provided attentive descriptions and evaluations of the Maghrib as a territorial, but also an ethnic and linguistic reality: in short, a different cultural area. This gave rise to a comparative tradition which would find its fullest expression in the Andalusian Ibn Jubayr's travelogue, written when the Almohads dominated the whole of the Maghrib.¹⁰

In the eyes of eastern Muslim geographers, Egypt appears as the last "oriental" region bordering the Maghrib: as al-Muqaddasī (945–991) put it, "the point of

8 On the possible meanings of the differing degrees of detail that the author-traveller provides in his description of Muslim religious buildings—above all, the recording of numbers and measures as a sign of the hierarchical classification he has in mind—see Calasso, "Les tâches du voyageur," 90–96, 100–101.

9 This difference was the main focus of an insightful article by Cahen, "Réflexions."

10 On this Berber dynasty, whose empire embraced the whole of western Muslim territory, and on the movement that led to its rise, see the important collective work edited by Cressier, Fierro, and Molina, *Los Almohades*.

intersection between *al-Maghrib* and the land of the Arabs" (*faṣl bayna al-maghrib wa diyār al-ʿarab*).¹¹ This seems to imply that "the West" is also ethnically different, the land of the Berbers. However, this distinction was actually made explicit for the first time in the work of his contemporary, the Iraqi geographer Ibn Ḥawqal (d. 998),¹² author of the first detailed description of the medieval Maghrib.¹³ As Jean-Claude Garcin has put it, "being the work of an Easterner, by then it designated the place this land had acquired within the empire of Islam."¹⁴ And indeed, Ibn Ḥawqal had witnessed the great changes of the tenth century: the explosive rise of Ismāʿīlism, the Byzantine empire's reconquest of some of its former territories in northern Syria, and the Abbasid caliphate's ultimate loss of power. His travels began around the 940s and his first stay in the Maghrib lasted three or four years; here, he saw that the success of the Fatimids' project of overthrowing the existing government in Ifrīqiya, going on to conquer Egypt and then advancing toward the East, clearly depended upon the support of the Kutama Berbers. This, in Garcin's words, was the main reason why "the Maghrib made such a grand entrance into geographical literature."¹⁵

As a result, two main components merged in the conceptualization of the Maghrib, in the worldview of eastern authors: the power of the Ismāʿīlī Fatimids and the influence of the Berbers. The former embodied a heterodox religious doctrine and political illegitimacy that challenged mainstream or "orthodox" Islam, as represented by the Abbasid caliphs of Baghdād; the latter were the non-Arab populations prevailing in North Africa, to whom the Fatimids owed their success. However, after the Fatimids settled in Egypt in 973 and partially fulfilled their ambitions of further eastern expansion, the situation changed and the Fatimids ceased to be strictly associated with Maghrib. In fact, it would only be with the Almohads' rise to power, and the extension of their conquests in the twelfth

11 Al-Muqaddasī, *Aḥsan al-taqāsīm*, 197. Here, the author specifically refers to the Egyptian city of Fustat. In rendering the term *faṣl*, "separation, division," as "point of intersection," I have followed Miquel's translation, which replicates al-Muqaddasī's stress on the role of Egypt as a "bridge" between the Islamic East and West: "Fruits of Shām [Syria] and Maghrib keep on being delivered here"; "[i]t is the granary of the West, the warehouse of the East"; as for Tinnis, "it is the place where the East and the West come to trade." See Miquel, "L'Égypte," 115–16, 119, 122.

12 The different structures of these two geographers' works and their implications is the subject of a comparative analysis in Calasso, "Constructing the Boundary."

13 Ibn Ḥawqal, *Configuration*, 2:57–105. Ibn Ḥawqal's work is only preceded by the much more schematic descriptions of al-Yaʿqūbī, Ibn al-Faqīh, and al-Istakhrī.

14 Garcin, "Ibn Hawqal," 77.

15 Garcin, "Ibn Hawqal," 85.

century, that the territorial boundaries of the Maghrib would be re-established, excluding Egypt once and for all.

Indeed, the major change in North Africa that occurred in the two centuries that elapsed between the lifetime of the Iraqi geographer Ibn Ḥawqal and that of the Andalusian author Ibn Jubayr was the rise of a new empire whose territories extended from Morocco to Lybia and also encompassed al-Andalus: the Berber-Muslim empire of the Almohads.¹⁶ Accordingly, Ibn Jubayr's *Riḥla* is full of comparative observations about East and West, and eastern and western Muslims. The eye of the traveller catches differences such as peculiar devotional practices, social behaviours, and linguistic usages.¹⁷ In so doing, he clearly suggests that this divergence was not just a matter of geographical distance, but of two different cultural domains within Islam. Ibn Jubayr also establishes a sort of hierarchy between East and West that appears to favour the former,¹⁸ yet he also feels the need to extol the merits of the West. For example, he acknowledges that the East is at the top of the intellectual ladder, and warmly encourages the young people "of our Maghreb" (*maghribunā*) to travel East for their studies, particularly to Damascus.¹⁹ He also avers that eastern preachers have no peers in the Maghrib.²⁰ However, the East is also a place of dangerous religious divisions ("these eastern lands of sects and heretical groups and schisms") while "there is no Islam save in the Maghrib lands": a statement which is followed by an explicit homage to the Almohads, because "there is no justice nor truth except among the Almohads and they are the last legitimate

16 On the doctrinal originality of the Almohads, see the "Introduction" by Cressier, Fierro, and Guichard to *Los Almohades*, 1:xix.

17 When quoting Ibn Jubayr's *Riḥla*, I cite Broadhurst's English translation, *Travels of Ibn Jubayr* (henceforth B.), and Wright-De Goeje's edition of the Arabic text (henceforth *Riḥla*). The "strange" behaviour of eastern Muslims is described in detail, be it their funeral customs, their peculiar way of greeting and addressing each other, or of walking with their hands behind their backs: B., 310; *Riḥla*, 294–96. Ibn Jubayr also notes that the devotion they show to pilgrims coming back from Mecca—in Damascus as well as in Baghdad—is "the opposite of what we were used to in the Maghrib" (*ḍidd mā i'tadnā fī l-maghrib*): B., 300; *Riḥla*, 286. The teaching methods are also different "in these eastern lands" (*bi-hādhihi l-bilād al-mashriqiyya*): the Qur'ān is only learnt by heart, while poetry is used to learn writing: B., 283; *Riḥla*, 272. As for "the convents (*al-ribāṭāt*), they call them *khawāniq*": B., 297; *Riḥla*, 284.

18 Some of Ibn Jubayr's verses, as quoted by Ibn al-Khaṭīb (1313–1374), also show an unconditional admiration for the East: "There is no comparison between East and West: the East possesses all the merits indeed" (*lā-yastawī sharq al-bilād wa-gharbuḥā / al-sharq ḥāza l-faḍl bi-'stihqāq*). For Ibn al-Khaṭīb's biographical entry on Ibn Jubayr, see *Riḥla*, 2–10.

19 B., 298; *Riḥla*, 285.

20 "We marvelled at their excellence in comparison with the speakers we knew in the West": B., 233; *Riḥla*, 224.

imams of this time.”²¹ There is only one exception: “However, we must *except* this just sultan, Saladin” (*illā hadhā al-sultān al-‘ādil Ṣalāḥ al-dīn*).

Almohads, Fatimids, and the Role of Saladin in Ibn Jubayr’s *Riḥla*

It is known that Ibn Jubayr lived in Granada and worked there as a secretary of the Almohad governor. In 1183, when he was about forty, he went on a pilgrimage that lasted two years, beginning with a sea voyage from Ceuta to Alexandria, on a Genoese ship, and concluding in Sicily, which would be the last leg of his journey. Landing in Alexandria, he was searched by the eastern Muslim customs officers, just like every Latin Christian passenger, marking the start of Ibn Jubayr’s condition as a *gharīb*, a foreigner. In fact, the word *gharīb* (pl. *ghurabā*) occurs frequently in the *Riḥla* to indicate those who are not native to the eastern territories through which Ibn Jubayr travelled, as well as to highlight their (and his own) feelings of being foreign. As Franz Rosenthal has observed, “within the community of believers and wherever Muslims were in political control there was, in theory, no such distinct category as a ‘stranger’. Ideally, every Muslim was always at home among other Muslims.”²² However, the actual situation was different from the ideal one, and Ibn Jubayr’s account is revealing in this regard. Although he does not refer to himself explicitly as a *gharīb* after his landing in Alexandria, his reference to his own and his fellow Muslim companions’ feeling of humiliation (*dhull*) after being searched by the customs officers is significant.²³ Also, at the end of his journey, when in Trapani and waiting to embark for al-Andalus, Ibn Jubayr says he took part in the end of the Ramadan festival by offering up “the foreigners’ prayer.”²⁴ And among the *ghurabā*, those in whom Ibn Jubayr took a particular interest were, like him, Maghribī.

In the Egyptian part of his travelogue, the Almohads are at first evoked through obscure references to certain predictions circulating in Egypt, which foretold the Almohads’ future conquest of the country:

²¹ B., 73; *Riḥla*, 78. On such pro-Almohads statements contextualized within the broader framework of the relationships between the Almohads and the Maliki scholars of al-Andalus, see Viguera, “Las reacciones,” 2:719 and *passim*.

²² Rosenthal “The Stranger,” 1–2.

²³ Indeed, Rosenthal draws attention to the fact that Ibn al-Marzūbān (d. 1066) devoted a special chapter of his work to *dhull al-ghurba*. Rosenthal “The Stranger,” 42n21.

²⁴ Broadhurst translates this phrase as “the travellers’ prayer” (B., 353); but in Arabic the word is clearly “foreigner”: *ṣallaynā ṣalāt al-ghurabā* (*Riḥla*, 336).

Between the mosque of Ibn Tulun and Cairo are two old and closely-built towers. On one is a statue facing the west, while on the other there had been a statue looking to the east [...] By a strange conjuncture the falling of the statue facing the east was followed by the victory of the Ghuzz (the Seljuk Turks under Saladin) over the 'Ubaydi (Fatimid) power [...] They now expect the fall of the statue facing west and the fulfillment of their hopes of being governed by the people of the west. Please God it may be so!²⁵

However, when Ibn Jubayr reaches Hijaz and witnesses first hand the rapacity of Mecca's *amīr*, he himself clamours for the intervention of the Almohads in a strongly worded appeal:

How can it be that the House of God should now be in the hands of people who use it as an unlawful source of livelihood, making it a means of illicitly claiming and seizing property, and detaining the pilgrims on its account [...] May God soon correct and purify this place by relieving the Muslims of these destructive schismatics with the swords of the Almohads, the defenders of the Faith [...] There is no justice, right or religion in His sight except with the Almohads—may God render them powerful. They are the last just imams of this time.²⁶

Thus, in the *Rihla*, the Almohads are explicitly named and lavishly praised,²⁷ while the Fatimids are only hinted at through reiterated mentions of the merits of Saladin, who abolished all the illicit taxes they had introduced in Egypt: “this just sultan, whom we have mentioned for his conduct and virtues.”²⁸

Hence, Saladin—although an easterner, a Kurd, and a Sunnī who recognized the authority of the Abbasid caliph—is cleared of all responsibility for the harassment inflicted on pilgrims by the customs officials, despite the fact that the author-traveller was a subject of the Berber Almohad caliphs of the Maghrib and a member of their administration. This reveals the tension between his “local” sense

²⁵ B., 74; *Rihla*, 79. Brackets indicate passages which I have not included in my quotations, while the material in parentheses are Broadhurst's original comments.

²⁶ B., 73; *Rihla*, 78. I have slightly modified Broadhurst's translation, which renders Almohads as “Almohades.”

²⁷ On the complex relations between Maliki men of letters as well as '*ulamā*' of al-Andalus and the Almohads, see Viguera, “Las reacciones,” 705–35. This article also focuses on the “pro-Almohad register” of Ibn Jubayr's passages, in contrast with the decisive role played by the “western” Maliki Muslims in Egypt between the late Fatimid and Ayyubid periods, who helped to reorganize the Maliki intellectual circles of the country: Viguera, “Las reacciones,” 720–21.

²⁸ B., 73; *Rihla*, 78.

of belonging as a Muslim from al-Andalus, a Maghribī, and his feeling of being part of the *Umma*, the all-encompassing community of the believers. Although he cannot help noting the East's internal divisions and factionalism during the course of his journey, just as he cannot ignore the fact that the Maghrib is equally plagued by strife, he aims to depict the world under Islamic sovereignty as a unified entity, thanks to the role of Saladin. Celebrating Saladin alongside the Almohads meant associating two Muslim political powers, the former in the Mashriq, the latter in the Maghrib, fighting against the Latin Christian enemy. This search for unifying elements can also be found in the attention he devotes to describing the monuments which represent Islam throughout its territories.

Comparing Ibn Jubayr's Descriptions of Muslim Religious Buildings and That of the Egyptian Temple of Akhmīm

Description of the buildings—both religious and non-religious—which Ibn Jubayr visits and observes during his journey take up a significant portion of his *Rihla*. In all the cities where he stops, the traveller systematically catalogues those buildings that represent what might be called the “constants” of Islam:²⁹ Friday or “congregational” mosques, *madrasas* (colleges), and hospitals “which are among the great glories of Islam,” as well as hammams, essential for the ablutions required, in case of major impurity, for performance of the ritual prayer. But as a close analysis of his *Rihla* reveals, the describing and, above all, measuring of particular religious monuments is not merely an informative act; it also appears to be an exercise in cognitive appropriation which Ibn Jubayr reserves for just a few buildings that carry significant symbolic value. Moreover, judging from the painstaking way in which the traveller describes the Ka'ba—indicating the measurements he himself took of every single part of *al-bayt al-ḥarām*, “the Holy House”—and comparing it with his other descriptions of buildings, we can infer that a normative hierarchy dictates his selection of buildings to mention, to count or not to count, as well as those to describe and measure in detail.³⁰

As a devout and learned Muslim, Ibn Jubayr must have had in mind the five moral categories of human action established by Muslim jurists. According to this classification, acts are qualified as obligatory (*farḍ*), recommended (*mustaḥabb* or *mandūb*), permissible (*mubāḥ*), reprehensible or disapproved (*makrūh*), and forbidden (*ḥarām*). Not only does Ibn Jubayr dedicate special care to describing and measuring the Ka'ba sanctuary in Mecca, then the Prophet's mosque in Medina and

²⁹ See Calasso, “Les tâches du voyageur.”

³⁰ Calasso, “Les tâches du voyageur,” particularly 90–95, 100–101.

the great Umayyad mosque in Damascus, he even feels obliged to provide details of the Jerusalem mosque which he was *not* able to visit at the time, since the city was under Frankish rule. Nevertheless, he includes information about its length and width, as well as enumerating the number of columns, lamps, and doors as given by a reliable source: the Córdoba scholar al-Fanakī.³¹ All of these descriptions and measurements seem to be ranked, in Ibn Jubayr's mind, between obligatory (*farḍ*) and recommended (*mandūb*) acts.

Similarly, the astonishing and mysterious monumental remains of ancient Egypt, which had been almost completely ignored by the Persian traveller Nāṣir-i Khusraw (1004–1088) about 150 years earlier,³² are not only an object of wonder to Ibn Jubayr but also deserve scrupulous description. In particular, the degree and detail of the quantitative data provided in describing the (no longer extant) temple of Akhmīm,³³ located on the caravan route from Cairo to the Red Sea port of 'Aydhāb—including measurements the author stresses that he took himself, as well as the description of the images on its walls—clearly indicate that this was a deliberate and meaningful choice. It had, for Ibn Jubayr, a positive ethical value, making it a “recommended” act. Here, I quote a selection of the passages particularly worthy of note, using italics to highlight the author's attention to specific dimensions and images.

Its length is two hundred and twenty cubits, and its breadth one hundred and sixty. The people of these parts know it as a birbā.³⁴ [...] This great temple is supported by forty columns, beside its walls, the circumference of each column being fifty spans and the distance between them thirty spans. Their capitals are of great size and perfection, cut in an unwonted fashion and angulated in ornate style as if done by turners. The whole is embellished with many colours, lapis lazuli and others. The columns are carved in low relief from top to bottom. Over the capital of each column and stretching to

31 Ibn Jubayr refers to him as “our companion, the jurisprudent, ascetic, and traditionalist.” When describing the Mosque of al-Kallāsa (the Lime-Kiln), which lies north of the Umayyad mosque in Damascus, he adds that al Fanakī would lead the prayer there on that day: B., 278.

32 See Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Book of Travels*, 63. Having left northeastern Iran to perform the pilgrimage to Mecca in 1047, Nasir-i Khusraw travelled through Egypt at the time of the Fatimids. A converted Ismā'īlī himself, his main focus was the extraordinary prosperity of Egypt under the admirable government of the Fatimid caliphs.

33 On Ibn Jubayr's description, also invaluable for Egyptologists, see Sauneron, “Le temple d'Akhmīm.”

34 The Arabic word *barbā*, also vocalized *birbā*, is a transcription of the Coptic *p'erpé*, temple, “and usage has endowed it with a classical plural *barābi*”: see Wiet, “*Barbā*.” See also El Daly, *Egyptology*, 50–51.

its neighbour is a great slab of carved stone, the biggest of which we measured and found to be fifty-six spans in length, ten in width, eight in depth. [...] Each slab has a different painting. Some are adorned with comely pictures of birds with outstretched wings making the beholder believe they are about to fly away; others are embellished with human images³⁵ very beautiful to look upon and of elegant form, each image having a distinctive shape, for example holding a statuette or a weapon, or a bird, or a chalice, or making sign to another with the hand. Within and without this great temple, both in its upper and its lower parts, are pictures all of varied form and description. Some are dreadful, inhuman forms that terrify the beholder and fill him with wonder and amazement. There was hardly the space of an awl or needle-hole which did not have an image or engraving or some hieroglyphic writing which is not understood [...] In a word, this temple has a sublime grandeur, and its sight is one of the wonders of the world, beyond description.³⁶

Compared to the Almohads' architectural purism and the "imageless iconography"³⁷ which characterized their artistic production, this Egyptian temple, completely covered with images, might have appeared to Ibn Jubayr as incarnating a reprehensible heathen past. And yet his description is extremely meticulous, nearly as meticulous as the description he will provide of the Ka'ba³⁸ when performing *ḥajj*. In his intention not to overlook anything—from the number of columns to their massive circumference and the distance between them, to the length and width of the stone slabs of the superjacent terrace and the detailed description of the images of animals and human beings represented in particular postures—we cannot help but perceive a remarkable manifestation of cultural curiosity toward a world regarded with amazement as totally "other," and yet no less deserving of admiration and careful study.³⁹ It is a curiosity and admiration that Ibn Jubayr does

35 I have chosen El Daly's rendering of the Arabic *taṣāwīr ādamiyya* (*Egyptology*, 52), instead of Broadhurst's translation "images of men" (B., 54).

36 B., 54–55; *Riḥla*, 61.

37 Cressier, Fierro, Guichard, "Introduction" to *Los Almohades*, xxii. For an analysis of one specific field of Almohad artistic production, see Barrucand, "Les enluminures," 71–121.

38 Calasso, "Les tâches du voyageur," 93–95.

39 A large body of Arabic sources on ancient Egypt has been collected by Okasha El-Daly in his *Egyptology: The Missing Millennium*. This invaluable collection (accounts of geographers and travellers, historical and hagiographic writings, books on deciphering ancient scripts, accounts and manuals of treasure hunters, and books on alchemy) spans the period from the seventh to the sixteenth century and demonstrates "that the medieval Arabs were interested in, had knowledge of and attempted to interpret the culture of Ancient Egypt," thus bridging the gap between the works of classical writers and those of modern Europeans. Nonetheless,

not feel the need to justify; as if, to his mind, his responses were an expression of piety, implicitly highlighting the value of “instructive example,” *‘ibra*, assigned to such a magnificent pagan building. In Ulrich Haarmann’s words, it stood as a “petrified admonition granted by God to the believer so that he will always remember the transitoriness and futility of human glory and might.”⁴⁰

Muslim intellectuals’ intense interest in such ancient monuments is corroborated by a younger contemporary of Ibn Jubayr: the famous Iraqi physician and Aristotelian commentator ‘Abd al-Laṭīf al-Baghdādī (d. 1231). He would deplore the destructive fury of Saladin’s successor, al-Malik al-‘Azīz ‘Uthmān, who would try to demolish the pyramid of Mykerinos in 1196/1197, spending an enormous amount of money only to achieve next to nothing. As Haarmann has observed, al-Baghdādī’s contemptuous description of this arrogant young ruler’s vain attempts to destroy the architectural feats of the pharaohs “counts among the most impressive documents of the differentiated medieval Muslim attitudes toward Ancient Egypt and its heritage.”⁴¹ It would not be too long before the Egyptian historian and traditionist Abū Ja‘far al-Idrīsī (d. 1251)—dedicating a monograph to the pyramids around 1238—affirmed that it was a highly recommended (*mandūb*) act, incumbent upon all pious believers, to visit the *mirabilia* on earth.⁴² This injunction explicitly recognized the warning role played by monumental pharaonic remains.⁴³ In order to emphasize this role—Haarmann observed—al-Idrīsī resorted to the example of the Prophet’s companions, who enjoyed resting in the shadow of the pyramids and temples and did not mind being buried in their vicinity.⁴⁴ Thus, the venerable forefathers’ example would legitimize the integration of those wondrous pagan relics into the heritage of Islamic Egypt. At the same time, Egypt’s identity and centrality within the Islamicate world would be reaffirmed, distinguishing it both from the East and the West, in which it would

on the basis of this rich documentary corpus, it is still necessary to analyze more closely how, when, and in what measure the Arab authors’ interest emerged. This study is intended to be a small contribution to such research.

40 Haarmann, “Medieval Muslim Perceptions,” 623.

41 Haarmann, “Medieval Muslim Perceptions,” 621. The account is included in al-Baghdādī’s treatise *Al-ifāda wa’l-i’tibār*.

42 Haarmann, “Regional Sentiment,” 59–60; and *Das Pyramidenbuch*, 69–70 (Arabic text, 14–15).

43 The first chapter of al-Idrīsī’s work is entirely centred on the theme of *ubi sunt qui ante nos in mundo fuere*: “where are those who came before us?” (as articulated in the Vulgate Bible’s translation of Baruch 3:16–19). See *Das Pyramidenbuch*, 5–11 (Arabic text); see also chap. 7, 152.

44 Haarmann, “Regional Sentiment,” 60; and “Medieval Muslim Perceptions,” 624.

never be included—not even at the hands of the Almohads, despite the predictions reported in the *Rihla*.

Of course, we cannot safely assume that Ibn Jubayr's care in describing the Egyptian temple of Akhmīm indicates an intention beyond his desire to let the reader experience first hand (so to say) its extraordinary dimensions and to demonstrate that he had seen it with his own eyes. Yet, it is worth remembering Marc Bloch's words: "even when most anxious to bear witness, that which the text tells us expressly has ceased to be the primary object of our attention today. Ordinarily, we prick up our ears far more eagerly when we are permitted to overhear what was never intended to be said."⁴⁵ Ibn Jubayr was not an Egyptian, and so his care in providing such a detailed description of the magnificent temple of Akhmīm cannot be related to that Muslim "regional sentiment"⁴⁶ which asserted itself over time, despite the sombre image of pharaonic Egypt in the Qur'ān and in Islamic tradition, and in contrast to the attitude of certain fanatical iconoclasts who "crusaded" against these pagan monuments.⁴⁷ Instead, the fact that the traveller bestows an ethically positive value on the effort of measuring and meticulously describing them is evidence of the fact that he voices a broader change of mentality in his symbolic appropriation of this wondrous pre-Islamic past, even though it is unique

⁴⁵ Bloch, *The Historian's Craft*, 63; cf. *Apologie pour l'histoire*, 25: "jusque dans les témoignages les plus résolument volontaires, ce que le texte nous dit expressément a cessé aujourd'hui d'être l'objet préféré de notre attention. Nous nous attachons ordinairement avec bien plus d'ardeur à ce qu'il nous laisse entendre, sans avoir souhaité le dire."

⁴⁶ In the 1980s, this issue was the object of a debate in which the views of Michael Cook (in particular, "Pharaonic History") contrasted with Ulrich Haarmann's. Cook's careful examination of medieval Arabic sources on pre-Islamic Egyptian history and the construction of the pyramids shows evidence of a predominantly eastern—Iraqi—influence, particularly in the transmission of the "Hermetic history" (Cook, "Pharaonic History," 99: "Whatever it was, it was not the national history of the Copts in early Islamic Egypt"). Cook's point is that "unlike Iran, Egypt had lost its ancient polity and culture long before the Muslim conquest, its Christianization having broken any lingering sense of identification with that past" ("Pharaonic History," 100). According to him, and contrary to what Haarmann maintained ("Regional Sentiment," 57–58), even the genre of *faḍā'il Miṣr*, "the excellences of Egypt," which displayed considerable pride in the ancient monuments of the country, "conveys no sense whatever of identification with the people and culture which created them" (Cook, "Pharaonic History," 102). It is true that there was not "an Egyptian Firdawsi who had the freedom to eulogize and thus legitimize and revive his country's pagan past" (Haarmann, "Regional Sentiment," 56); and yet, as Sam Gellens pointed out, the biographies of Egyptian *'ulamā'* rarely include the term *riḥla*, referring to travel for study—normally an essential feature in the instruction of an *'ālim*—almost as if the ancient vision of Egypt as the centre of the universe had become part of the cultural patrimony of Egyptian Islam (Gellens, "The Search for Knowledge," 57–58).

⁴⁷ This movement would reach its peak between the middle and the end of the fourteenth century: Haarmann, "Regional Sentiment," 62.

to Egyptian territory. At a critical time for the Muslim world, this affirms Islam's strength and superiority—as if foreshadowing the prestigious role that Egypt would play as a bulwark against fresh offensives from the crusaders in the West and Mongols in the East, in the decades after Ibn Jubayr's own death.

Describing the Church of St. Mary of the Admiral in Palermo

During his journey through the regions of Mashriq, no Christian building attracted enough of Ibn Jubayr's attention to deserve a description, with the exception of one admiring yet extremely concise and conventional reference to the Mariamite Cathedral in Damascus: "Inside the city is a church held in great consideration by the Rum [eastern Christians]. It is called Mary's Church. [...] It is an elegant structure with remarkable pictures that amaze the mind and hold the gaze, and its spectacle is wonderful indeed."⁴⁸ Besides this remark, we find little more than the mention of a common place of worship, for both Christians and Muslims, in the vicinity of Acre (ʿAkka): "To the east of the town is the spring called ʿAyn al-Baqar [...] Over it is a mosque of which there remains in its former state only the *mihrab*, to the east of which the Franks have built their own *mihrab*⁴⁹ and Muslim and infidels assemble there, the one turning to his place of worship, the other to his."⁵⁰ There is also a reference to a church turned into a mosque in a village around Damascus ("its church is now a blessed mosque").⁵¹ Conversely, he notes that, after the Christians took Acre, its "mosques became churches and minarets bell-towers."⁵² As for the city of Akhmīm in Upper Egypt, in the vicinity of the ancient Egyptian temple, "there are monuments and constructions built by the Copts and churches attended till today by the Christian Copt clients."⁵³

However, when in Sicily, the last stop on his return journey, Ibn Jubayr was extremely impressed by the Church of St. Mary of the Admiral in Palermo, better known today as the Martorana. He called it "the Antiochian's church," (*kanīsat al-anṭākī*) after the name of its founder, George of Antioch (d. 1151 or 1152), the

⁴⁸ B., 295–96; *Riḥla*, 283 (explanation mine).

⁴⁹ This unexpected use of the term *mihrāb*—the niche indicating the direction of Muslim prayer—for Christian worship does not necessarily refer to a specific architectural element, but rather to the fact that Christians had established a place for prayer, probably an altar, within a former mosque.

⁵⁰ B., 318–19; *Riḥla*, 303.

⁵¹ B., 288; *Riḥla*, 277.

⁵² B., 318; *Riḥla*, 303.

⁵³ B., 53; *Riḥla*, 60.

admiral and chief minister of the Norman king Roger II (r. 1130–1154). And he dedicated a significant passage to it, which I quote in its entirety in order to highlight (in italics) the focus of his attention, as well as the scant amount of detail he provides compared to his description of Akhmīm's temple.

One of the most remarkable works of the infidels that we saw was the church known as the Church of the Antiochian. We examined it on the Day of the Nativity (Christmas Day), which with them is a great festival; and a multitude of men and women had come to it [...] It is beyond dispute the most wonderful edifice in the world. The inner walls are all embellished with *gold*. There are slabs of coloured marble, the like of which we had never seen, inlaid throughout with *gold mosaic* and surrounded by branches (formed from) green mosaic. In its upper parts are well-placed windows of *gilded glass* which steal all looks by the brilliance of their rays, and bewitch the soul. *God protect us from their allurement* [*fitna na'ūdhu bi-llāh minhā*]. We learnt that *its founder*, after whom it was named, *spent hundred-weights of gold* on it. He had been vizier to the grandfather of this polytheist King. This church has a belfry supported by columns of coloured marble. It was raised cupola over cupola, each with separate columns, and is therefore known as the Columned Belfry, and is one of the most wonderful constructions to be seen. May God, in His kindness and benevolence, soon exalt it with the *adhan* ('*call to prayers*').⁵⁴

St. Mary's of the Admiral was an Orthodox church built in the Byzantine cross-in-square style and constructed just a few decades before Ibn Jubayr's visit. The church clearly fascinated the traveller, so much that he did not hesitate to define it as "the most wondrous building in the world"; but it also aroused in him a fear of seduction, the danger of being led into apostasy by the admiration of its rich beauty.

The scope of this description is limited compared to that dedicated to the temple of Akhmīm—suited, perhaps, to the small dimensions of the Christian building. But it is also notably incomplete. While Ibn Jubayr was very impressed by the mosaics that constitute its most important interior decoration, he ignored their conspicuous figurative display: when he saw the church, an image of the Virgin undoubtedly occupied the central apse, which was destroyed in the seventeenth-century reconstruction, while the figures in the two lateral apses represent the Virgin's parents, Joachim and Anna. There were also images of saints and prophets, the scenes of the Annunciation and Christ's Presentation in the

⁵⁴ B., 349; *Rihla*, 332–33 (for the bracketed text in Arabic).

Temple, the Nativity and Dormition of the Virgin, and the *Christos Pantokrator* in the summit of the dome.⁵⁵ Even supposing that Ibn Jubayr was not able to see some of the mosaics—such as the two dedicatory panels depicting George of Antioch at the feet of the Virgin Mary and Roger II crowned by Christ, in all likelihood originally located in the inner narthex⁵⁶—the entirety of this rich figurative ensemble is not even mentioned, let alone described. The word gold, *dhahab*, repeated several times, seems to sum up the “temptation” (*fitna*) emanating from this church. So while Ibn Jubayr’s depiction of the Martorana’s interior is evocative, it is also rather sketchy: the traveller clearly did not feel entitled, as a devout Muslim, to describe it in detail. The fear of lingering too long over the description—or, indeed, inside the church itself—is evident when, having mentioned the gilded glass windows, he exclaims: “God protect us from their allurement (*fitna*)!”

Fitna is a word highly charged with negative connotations. It combines the Qur’ānic meaning of “trial, temptation” or the concept of “putting the believer’s faith to the test” with the idea of “dissension, sedition, and civil war between Muslims.” Indeed, the “great discord” or civil war that followed the murder of the caliph ‘Uthman (d. 656) and from which the great permanent divisions of the Muslim community originated, was known as the “great *fitna*.” The same word was used to name all subsequent large-scale civil conflicts in the Umayyad and Abbasid periods. Much closer to Ibn Jubayr in time and place was another *fitna*, the civil war that had ended the Umayyad caliphate in al-Andalus during the first half of the eleventh century, giving rise to the political fragmentation of the *taifa* kingdoms, which also marked the beginning of Christian conquest.⁵⁷ Here in Palermo, inside this Norman church gleaming with golden mosaics, the traveller seems to be overwhelmed by the fear of having his faith put to the test and being induced to apostasy: this, indeed, is the hidden but unifying thread woven into the entire narration of his stay in Sicily. For instance, Ibn Jubayr reports being told that when King William II (r. 1166–1189) would hear that a (Muslim) physician or astrologer was passing through his land, he would order him to be detained and would provide him with a livelihood “such as to make him forget his native land: “May God preserve the Muslims from this seduction (*fitna*)!”⁵⁸

⁵⁵ See Kitzinger, *Mosaics*, 123ff. and 169ff.

⁵⁶ Kitzinger, *Mosaics*, 105–6. The two panels were moved during the church renovation in the Baroque period from their original location, and are currently positioned at the forefront, catching the visitor’s eye on entering the church.

⁵⁷ See Denaro, “And God Dispersed Their Unity,” in this issue.

⁵⁸ B., 345; *Rihla*, 329. I have added the word *fitna* (translated in different ways by Broadhurst) here and in the two subsequent quotations, wherever it occurs in Ibn Jubayr’s text.

Having met groups of Christians who treat him and his companions with great courtesy, Ibn Jubayr comments, "We observed in their attitude and insinuating address toward the Muslims that which would offer temptation (*fitna*) to ignorant souls. May God, in his power and bounty preserve from seducement (*fitna*) the people of Muhammad!"⁵⁹ He also voices the general fear that a Muslim son or a daughter might, because of an argument with their parents, seek shelter in a church and there be baptized. "The dread of their falling in this temptation (*fitna*) would alone shorten their father's life."⁶⁰ So it is the fear of *fitna*, not only as political and religious turmoil within the Muslim community, but as the sense of imminent danger of being overpowered by the Christian enemy, which becomes apparent in the final section of Ibn Jubayr's travelogue. All of this finds its symbolic expression in the Antiochian's church.

Ibn Jubayr does not seem to know a great deal about George of Antioch, and certainly he ignores the crucial role he played in constructing the Norman kingdom.⁶¹ But could he have ignored the role that Roger's admiral played in the Norman conquest of Muslim North African cities? In June of 1146, the town of Tripoli fell to the Sicilian fleet under this admiral, and Mahdiyya was taken by him in July of 1148, when the invaders reportedly seized a huge amount of booty.⁶² Even though Norman expansion into Ifrīqiya under Roger II and George of Antioch would end in failure within the space of ten years—due to the Almohad "reconquista"—"the Antiochian" had been able to lead the Christian forces to victory in North Africa, conquering many important coastal cities which had been under Muslim domination for centuries and, in some cases, had even been founded by Muslims. Thus, St. Mary's of the Admiral, a Christian building of his time, located in a territory which was no longer *dār al-islām*, symbolized to Ibn Jubayr the dangerous present with which Islam had to cope. A detailed description of this church's interior would have been, to Ibn Jubayr's mind, "reprehensible" (*makrūh*) indeed.

Some Concluding Remarks

It has been observed that "Ibn Jubayr is almost alone among medieval travel writers in his careful, even obsessive, attention to dates."⁶³ Yet the convention

⁵⁹ B., 345; *Rihla*, 325.

⁶⁰ B., 359; *Rihla*, 342.

⁶¹ On the fascinating figure of George of Antioch and his complex role and experience in Byzantine administration, as well as in Mahdiyya, at the Muslim Zirid court before becoming one of the most important figures of Norman Sicily, see Metcalfe, *Muslims of Medieval Italy*, 124–28.

⁶² Metcalfe, *Muslims of Medieval Italy*, 164.

⁶³ Weber, "Construction of Identity," 4. See also Netton, "Basic Structures," 24–25.

of providing Christian calendar equivalents (day and month) is an even more remarkable feature of his *Rihla*. While implying the author's acknowledgement of the Christian Other, the systematic use of double dating expresses, through this reiterated implicit comparison, the need to emphasize boundaries between different identities. Therefore, Ibn Jubayr's constant reference to both Muslim and Christian calendars tells the story of two powers and religious systems confronting, but also balancing, each other. In Ian Netton's words, "It was a strange age of real intercultural travel and trading, produced by centuries of co-operation, on the one hand, coexisting beside very real intercultural military strife produced by the Crusades, on the other, an apparent paradox upon which Ibn Jubayr himself felt moved to comment and rank among the *'ajā'ib* [wondrous things] of his narrative."⁶⁴

However, the fascination and disquiet caused in him by the "Antiochian's church" in Palermo summarizes the contradictory feelings which the traveller experienced in Sicily, while also revealing broader premonitory concerns for the future of Islam in the Mediterranean. Ibn Jubayr is unsettled by the uncertain frontiers between Christianity and Islam which he perceives in the island under Norman dominion, and constantly surprised by not finding clearly visible differences between Christians and Muslims, nor the social and cultural gaps he would have expected to discern between them. The Norman king William II "resembles" a Muslim prince, he reads and writes Arabic, to sign documents he uses an *'alāma* (a kind of motto, written in Arabic, similar to the ones with which Muslim princes headed their rescripts), he is keen to be surrounded by Muslim physicians and astrologers, and his court is full of Muslims in high-ranking positions.⁶⁵ Moreover, the Christian women who crowd "the Antiochian's church" on Christmas Day bear "all the adornments of Muslim women, including jewellery, henna on the fingers, and perfumes"⁶⁶ and the Christians whom Ibn Jubayr meets around the island, at court, or in the streets are more than affable with Muslim foreigners.⁶⁷ The pleasant surprise of unexpectedly feeling at ease in enemy territory vanishes mainly during his final stay in Trapani, when he is secretly told by some Sicilian Muslims that they have been harassed and pressured into apostasy. This, paradoxically, seems to re-establish the "right" boundaries.

On the contrary, no fear of "temptation" is betrayed by Ibn Jubayr's description of the Egyptian temple, only amazement and admiration. Thanks to the remote era to which it belonged, it allowed the revival of the sapiential theme of

⁶⁴ Netton, "Basic Structures," 60.

⁶⁵ B., 340–41; *Rihla*, 325.

⁶⁶ B., 350; *Rihla*, 333.

⁶⁷ B., 345; *Rihla*, 329.

ubi sunt, and thus the integration of pre-Islamic Egypt's prestigious legacy into Islam itself. Appropriating the *mirabilia* of Egypt, witnesses to the vanished glory of the sovereigns who had built them, could only enhance the status of this central territory, the bridge between Maghrib and Mashriq in the Mediterranean, as well as a buttress against numerous attacks coming from different parts of the non-Muslim world.

Thus, the treatment Ibn Jubayr reserves for these two non-Muslim religious buildings should not be regarded as mere examples of his reputation as an observant and reliable traveller,⁶⁸ or of his literary skills. Rather, for him, both monuments have highly symbolic value and the different ways of describing them can be read as meaningful signs of how the Andalusian traveller grappled with ancient and contemporary cultural diversities in connection with the historical challenges of his time.

The period which spans the middle of the tenth and the end of the twelfth century was marked by a shift in supremacy within the world of Islam, from the East—its centre in Iraq—to the West of the Mediterranean, caused by the rise of new powers in North Africa, from the Fatimids to the Almohads. This is reflected in Ibn Jubayr's constant comparisons between Maghrib and Mashriq throughout his travelogue. At this time, however, the balance of power in the entire Mediterranean arena has definitely swung in favour of Latin Christians.⁶⁹ Hence, the systematic way in which the traveller counts, describes, and even measures the buildings that represent Islam and its unifying imprint on these territories appears as the ideal dimension of his *Riḥla*. In spite of the actual political and religious rifts within the *dār al-islām*, he aims to affirm Islamic unity, celebrating the achievements of Saladin alongside those of the Almohads in order to symbolically ally two Muslim political powers in the fight against the Latin Christian enemy: one in the Maghrib, the other in the Mashriq. The positive value which Ibn Jubayr assigns to the Egyptian temple of Akhmīm, symbolically appropriating this wondrous past, thus contrasts with the danger he perceives in lingering too long over the fascinating interior of St. Mary's of the Admiral in Palermo.

This contrast further testifies to how the broad transformations taking place in the Mediterranean affected the ways that the Andalusian traveller viewed and classified the reality around him, and how that contemporary turmoil was reflected in the narrative of his journey through the territories of Islam. In the East, he can witness all the divisions internal to the Muslim community and, when

⁶⁸ For example, El-Daly, *Egyptology*, 51. See also Netton, "Ibn Jubayr."

⁶⁹ On the complex array of factors which led to the transition from a Muslim hegemony in the Mediterranean to that of the Latin Christian world, parallel to the decline (within Islam) of the supremacy of the East in favour of the West, see *La Méditerranée*, 16–25.

visiting Baghdād, the capital of the Abbasid caliphate appears to him like a shadow of its former self; although this was his first time there, he evokes with literary nostalgia its now faded splendour: “In comparison with its former state, before misfortune struck it and the eyes of adversity turned toward it, it is like an effaced ruin, a remain washed out.”⁷⁰ Meanwhile in Acre, under the Franks, “mosques became churches and minarets bell-towers.” Is that not what was happening in al-Andalus as well? Ibn Jubayr is fully aware that, in his homeland, despite the presence of his celebrated Almohads, Christian forces keep taking territories away from Muslims who, as here, are fighting among themselves. The shadow of *fitna*, the discord internal to the Muslim community, is a looming shadow over his travelogue and his travels—from Hijāz, to Baghdād, to Syria—manifesting itself, above all, in his description of Norman Sicily, where *fitna* takes on its primary Qur’ānic meaning of “trial, temptation of one’s faith.” In the face of this danger and sense of impending loss, the author can only take refuge in dreams and make a wish: may the steeple of the Antiochian’s church, in Palermo, soon be honoured by the call to prayer of the muezzin!

70 B., 226; *Riḥla*, 217.

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Abstract In the context of the major changes which occurred between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries in the Mediterranean region, this article focuses on two passages from the famous travelogue of a Muslim author from al-Andalus, Ibn Jubayr's *Rihla*: the description of the ancient Egyptian temple of Akhmīm, and that of the Church of St. Mary of the Admiral, in Palermo—now better known as the Martorana. Both passages are considered within the framework of the traveller's two-year journey as a pilgrim (1183–1185) and, through a close comparative reading, this article suggests that Ibn Jubayr's different treatment of the two buildings reflects contemporary transformations in the balance of power within and outside the Islamic world. It shows how these upheavals affected the Muslim author's way of conceptualizing his own world and that of ancient and contemporaneous Others.

Keywords: Ibn Jubayr, *Rihla*, Norman Sicily, Maghrib, Egypt, temple of Akhmīm, Martorana, travel writing, George of Antioch, antiquarianism

HOW DOES A MOORISH PRINCE BECOME A ROMAN CAESAR? FICTIONS AND FORGERIES, EMPERORS AND OTHERS FROM THE SPANISH “FLORES” ROMANCES TO THE LEAD BOOKS OF GRANADA

KEITH BUDNER

WITHIN OUR CONSIDERATION of “writing in times of turmoil,” the romance legend of Prince Flores and his beloved Blancaflor presents a unique set of concerns. As the romance circulated throughout medieval Europe and the Mediterranean, the protagonist and his beloved went by as many names as the vernacular languages in which their story was written and rewritten: Floire and Blancheflor in Old French, Florios and Platziaflora in Byzantine Greek, Florio and Biancifiore in Italian (to list only a few).¹ But across such tellings and retellings, Flores is always a “Moorish” (Muslim) prince of al-Andalus, and his story is set amid the interreligious contact and conflict between Muslims and Christians, both in and beyond the Iberian Peninsula.² When the protagonists thus receive their literary baptism as “Flores y Blancaflor,” their translation into a Castilian vernacular stands as a homecoming and prompts us to consider what it means to continually *re-write* an already told story, and what happens when such re-writing occurs within the very *place* of turmoil represented in the narrative.

Indeed, the *Flores* romance was told not once but twice in Castilian, at two very different moments in the history of Muslim-Christian relations in Spain. The earlier version comes to us as part a chronicle contained in a manuscript dated to around 1390, though quite likely based on a thirteenth-century original.³ Here,

¹ Grieve has traced this transmission history, delving into the intricacies and divergences across the various versions. For a complete list and overview of the narrative variances, see Grieve, *Floire and Blancheflor*, Appendix B, 204–9.

² Though Flores is always an Andalusian prince, certain versions of the romance are more explicit about his and his family’s Islamic faith, with other versions opting for the vaguer descriptor of “pagan.” However, it was common for medieval Christians to refer to Muslims as “pagans”: O’Callaghan, *Reconquest and Crusade*, 14–17. For an analysis of the French version of the romance which simultaneously engages with the vocabulary of paganism while reading the narrative as a literary portrayal of Christian-Muslim sameness, see Shutters, “Christian Love.”

³ Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional de España MSS/7583. For details about this manuscript see the introduction to Arbesú’s critical edition of the *Crónica*.

the *Flores* legend finds itself within the *Estoria de Espanna*, originally composed at the court of Alfonso X “El Sabio” of Castile (r. 1252–1284), where it is woven into chapters describing the reign and military campaigns of the Asturian king Alfonso I “El Católico” (r. 739–757). Composed much later, the second version of the *Flores* romance marks the beginning of printing in Spain. Taking as its abbreviated title *The Story of the Two Lovers Flores and Blancaflor* (*La historia de los dos enamorados Flores y Blancaflor*), this text was published in 1512 by the press of Arnao Guillén de Brocar in Alcalá de Henares, where—just a little over a decade before—the influential archbishop and statesman Francisco Jiménez de Cisneros had expanded the *studium generale* of late thirteenth-century origins into a university that aimed to be Spain’s leading centre of humanist education. But despite its academic provenance and certain narrative elements that align with humanist interest in classical culture, this *Flores* was most likely aimed at a popular readership. It is far shorter than the Alfonsine version and seems to have always carried an illustrated frontispiece to attract the eye of the consumer. And attract it did: the text first printed in 1512 went on to various reprintings and re-editions over the course of the next several centuries, with three printings immediately following Brocar’s, one in 1524 and two in 1532, in Seville.⁴

These two *Flores* romances could therefore be taken to document how Christian–Muslim relations were imagined, retold, and received over the course of medieval Spanish (Christian) history. The Alfonsine *Flores* is historically linked to the reign of Alfonso I of Asturias, crowned in 739, just decades after the Muslim conquest of 711, when the northwestern Christian kingdom confronted the expansive Umayyad caliphate. At the time of its composition, however—between the latter half of the thirteenth century and 1390—the chronicle and its romance narrative are the products of a far different historical moment: after the fall of Seville in 1248, Muslim territory in Iberia was reduced to Naṣrid Granada, which paid annual tribute to the kingdom of Castile–Léon as a vassal state. As a cultural extension of this colonization, Alfonso X presided over a vast translation project that brought Arabic literature and science into Castilian. Meanwhile, the romance printed in 1512 takes us past the milestone year of 1492, when Granada fell to Isabel of Castile and Ferdinand of Aragón. Yet the status of Spain’s Muslims and Moriscos (Muslim converts to Christianity) remained unresolved two decades later and continued to present challenges for another century, until all Moriscos were expelled in 1609.

However, while these *Flores* romances might weave together eight centuries of history through both their content and the contexts of their textual

4 For a breakdown and discussion of the print history, see Baranda and Infantes “Estudio preliminar,” in *Narrativa Popular*, 27–29.

production, recent scholarship has challenged the triumphal and teleological notion of “Reconquista,” which has traditionally governed the narrative of Iberia’s interreligious conflict from 711 to 1492. Rather than a consistent ideological project, the historical process of Christian conquest was marked by constantly evolving political structures and shifting military alliances within and across Christian and Muslim polities. As an alternative, scholars such as Joseph O’Callaghan and Brian Catlos have adopted the more contemporary (medieval) vocabulary of holy war and crusade. And yet, as O’Callaghan has argued, the idea of reconquest does emerge within the early court historiography of Asturias: the very environment in which the Alfonsine chronicle locates its version of the *Flores* romance.⁵ At the same time, tracing the language of crusading within Iberia emphasizes that the peninsula’s interreligious conflict, while unique, was more broadly connected to Frankish military campaigns across the Mediterranean and to a variety of European colonial projects sanctioned by the Roman Church.

In particular, Frankish political-military elites and the papacy began to focus their attention on Iberia during the latter half of the eleventh century, when the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela increased in popularity across Europe and the Mediterranean. In this context, it is significant that the Alfonsine *Flores*, like the Old French poem that predates it, begins with a French nobleman and his wife going on pilgrimage to Compostela in thanksgiving for the pregnancy that will give birth to the heroine, Blanchefloire/Blancaflor. Both of these versions further connect the legend to France with another pregnancy and birth at the work’s conclusion: once married, *Flores* and *Blancaflor* have a daughter called Berta, who becomes the mother of Charlemagne. Though the printed romance alters the identity of *Blancaflor*’s parents from French to Italian, the pilgrimage to Santiago remains the work’s narratological starting point. Yet a critical divergence from the earlier version of the legend occurs at the end, when *Flores* becomes not grandfather to the Holy Roman Emperor Charlemagne, but an emperor of Rome: an actual Caesar in the classical mould.⁶ This final narrative turn in the 1512 romance constitutes the core of my discussion, which will focus on its historical and ideological significance.

Theories of narrative have long privileged romance as a genre entangled in history and politics; for Northrop Frye, romance narrativizes the ideals of a ruling

⁵ See especially O’Callaghan’s opening discussion in *Reconquest and Crusade*; and Catlos, *Infidel Kings*, 80–88.

⁶ *Flores*’ ascent to Roman imperial power does have one narrative precedent: the anonymous fourteenth-century Italian verse rendition known as the *Cantare di Fiorio e Biancifiore* carries the penultimate line “then at Rome he was elected emperor” (*Il cantare* 2:228). Because of this echo, and others, Patricia Grieve groups the *Cantare* and the 1512 romance, as well as Boccaccio’s *Il Filocolo*, into an Italo-Spanish strain; see discussion below.

class, rendering it the “nearest of all literary forms to the wish-fulfillment dream.”⁷ Frederick Jameson relocates Frye’s paradigm within a Freudian theory of the unconscious that is simultaneously implicated in the ideological structures outlined by Marxist socio-political theory: literary narrative is the symbolic act of a political unconscious.⁸ This is especially true for romance, a genre which relies on a forward-moving plot that bridges elite and popular culture. For Jameson, then, Marxism makes coherent the historicizing philosophies of the past and the function of literature as history’s symbolic expression. Frye’s own discussion presents two rather contradictory claims about the romance’s relationship to history, simultaneously connecting it to a plot conflict that “takes place in, or at any rate primarily concerns, our world” yet also framing it as a genre “marked by its extraordinarily persistent nostalgia, its search for some kind of imaginative golden age in time or space.”⁹

We can already detect such historical paradoxes at play in the two Spanish *Flores* romances, with the Alfonsine version’s interweaving of the story into the “real” *Estoria* and the 1512 version playing with historical time to make Muslim al-Andalus contemporaneous with the Roman empire. Each narrative thus combines actual historical events with an imagined past to render an idealization of history. But while the Roman-imperial endpoint of the 1512 romance obviously echoes the earlier Alfonsine chronicle’s concluding fantasy of Flores as the grandfather of Charlemagne, the former version makes this somewhat plausible by locating the legend within the reign of Alfonso I, 739–757 (Charlemagne was born in 742). By contrast, the 1512 romance ruptures historical time by anachronistically making Flores a Roman Caesar. This version, and its various reprintings over the course of the sixteenth century, coincides with Charles V’s rise to power in Iberia, beginning with the acceptance of his claim to the kingdom of Asturias in 1506, as heir-apparent to his mother, Queen Joanna, with whom he jointly ruled Castile and Aragon beginning in 1516; as well as his reign as Holy Roman Emperor (1519–1556). However, this political context does not explain the significance of Flores’ Moorish identity in his journey from Andalusian prince to Roman emperor.¹⁰

⁷ Frye, *Anatomy*, 186. David Wacks, in his analysis of the Alfonsine version of the romance, interprets Flores’ conversion as “fictional allegory for the Castilian military and spiritual designs on al-Andalus”: Wacks, “*Crónica*,” 275–76. However, Wacks offsets this propagandistic reading by proposing an ironic internal mockery introduced through the embedded historian Sigiberto, whom I shall also discuss.

⁸ Jameson discusses romance twice in the *Political Unconscious*: “Magical Narratives” (103–50) and again in “Romance and Reification” (206–80).

⁹ Frye, *Anatomy*, 186–87.

¹⁰ Alfonso X el Sabio also had aspirations of becoming Holy Roman Emperor, a crown which he claimed through his mother Beatrice of Swabia. While scholars have discussed the

As noted above, the watershed year of 1492 divides the world of the Alfonsine romance—the product of reconquest and crusade—from that of the 1512 version, which is embedded in the contemporary negotiation of the Moriscos' status in Catholic Spain. The printed romance thus looks to Rome for a narrative solution that addresses, as we shall see, the anxieties and uncertainties surrounding this negotiation. According to Jameson, such a conclusion is the very way in which the form of literary narrative becomes its own "ideological act [...] with the function of inventing imaginary or formal 'solutions' to unresolvable social contradictions."¹¹

To resolve the paradox of what it means to be both Spanish and Moorish (either Muslim or Morisco) after the Reconquista, the fictional resurrection of classical Rome becomes an imaginative and symbolic act. Nor was it the only such literary attempt to negotiate this paradox. As I will show, the forged Lead Books (*Libros plúmbeos*) of Sacromonte, "found" outside Granada beginning in 1595, further exemplify how socio-political contradictions seek narrative resolutions. They were very likely fabricated by the Moriscos of Granada—probably the same officials who verified their authenticity and translated the tablets' texts into Spanish.

Territorial Settings and Ethno-Linguistic Origins

In both the *Flores* legend and the Lead Books, Spain's Muslims are associated with St. James and the resting place of his relics at Compostela. In imitation or

Alfonsine chronicles in relation to these imperial ambitions (see Fraker, "Alfonso X"), less attention has been given to the Alfonsine *Flores* as a literary counterpart to such political claims—although Arbesú does briefly mention this context as a possible influence: *Crónica*, 22. By contrast, Grieve reads this work as "a political allegory ... that links the thrones of Spain and France," its concluding nod to Charlemagne evoking the contemporaneous Franco-Castilian union forged via the marriage of Alfonso el Sabio's first son and heir apparent, Fernando de la Cerda (1255–1275), to the daughter of Louis IX, aptly named Blanche: Grieve, *Floire and Blancheflor*, 34. Also attuned to royal politics, Wacks argues that the romance works to "legitimize the regime of Sancho IV," Alfonso's second son, who inherited the throne after the early death of his elder brother: Wacks, "*Crónica*," 270.

¹¹ Jameson, *Political Unconscious*, 79. Though the above quotation refers to "aesthetic and narrative form" more broadly, Jameson returns to the idea of imaginary solutions specific to romance later in his discussion (118–19). Frye has less to say about conclusions *per se*, and instead sees in romance a reliance on adventure that leads to "sequential and processional form," which at its most naïve is the wish for "endless form": Frye, *Anatomy*, 186. Frye, however, does acknowledge the narrative function of the "climacteric adventure" which provides romance with a completion usually forecast at the beginning, and this notion does bear certain resemblances both to Jameson's imaginary solutions and to the resolutions of the Spanish *Flores* romances; see below.

extension of the Acts of the Apostles, the Lead Books recount, in “Solomonic”¹² Arabic, an evangelizing mission undertaken by James in first-century Iberia. This narrative would have been construed as proof of the pious legend—crystalized in the twelfth-century *Historia Compostelana*—that, because of his earlier proselytizing, James’ bones were miraculously transported centuries later to a field in Galicia, establishing the site of the cathedral of Santiago.

Meanwhile, the *Flores* romances connect their narratives to the legend, cathedral, and pilgrimage of Santiago through the events that occur during the preceding generation of the protagonists’ parents. In this prior generation, there is always a nobleman and his wife, and this married couple is trying to conceive a child. The nobleman prays to St. James and promises that, if his wife is granted a child, he will perform a pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela. Once the pregnancy is detected, the wife insists that she join her husband on pilgrimage. En route, the couple is attacked by Muslims and the nobleman is killed; but his wife survives and is brought to the court of the Moorish king, where she is made handmaiden to his queen. The Moorish queen is herself pregnant at the time and, as fate would have it, the two give birth on the same day: the queen to Flores and the noblewoman to Blancaflor. Raised together as children, Flores and Blancaflor fall in love as they enter adolescence in spite of their different religious and ethno-cultural backgrounds.

The possibility of union between the Moorish Flores and the Christian Blancaflor further ties the plot of the romances to the Lead Books. Because the Lead Books imagine an Iberian community of first-century pre-Islamic Arabs whom James converts, the Moriscos of sixteenth-century Granada who “found” and likely fabricated the Lead Books presented these documents as both material-archeological evidence and textual-narrative precedent for their own ability to be faithful converts to Christianity *as well as* loyal members of the Spanish political community. Moreover, as with the 1512 romance, conversion within the Lead Books occurs against a backdrop of Moorish–Roman hybridity; Flores’ narrative journey to becoming a Roman Caesar is mirrored by the Lead Books’ image of a first-century Iberia where Arab and Hispano-Roman communities coexist. Yet even before the *Flores* of 1512 becomes a Roman Caesar, both versions of the romance reveal an ongoing narrative impulse to imagine Moorish and Roman hybridity through an overlapping series of movements. Thus the narrative movement of plot and action both clarifies and is clarified by various forms of cultural movement within the narrative: the circulation of people as well as material objects, the

12 These unusual characters take a more angular shape than contemporary Arabic script and were likely chosen for reasons both aesthetic and practical. On the one hand, they lent a more ancient, pre-Islamic character to the tablets; on the other, it is easier to inscribe metal with linear, rather than curved, markings.

linguistic movement from one language to another (translation), and finally the confessional movement from one religion to another (conversion).

Indeed, the Alfonsine romance interweaves movement and hybridity even into the rhetorical framing of its historiographic composition and authorship. As noted above, this version sets the story of Flores during the reign and military campaigns of Alfonso I of Asturias. Just as we learn about Blancaflor's parents and their pilgrimage, so too do we learn of Flores' father Fines, who is a prince in North Africa. In fact, it is with Fines that this story begins.

Sigiberto recounts in his history composed about *The Moorish Kings Who Were in Africa and Ruled Spain* that one among them was Ysca Miramomelin, and that he had a son named Fines. And when Fines grew to manhood, he was very handsome and well composed [...] and according to what Sigiberto recounts, this Fines was forceful in deeds of arms, and very honest with his people.¹³

As a narrative counterweight to the Asturian kingdom of Alfonso, the chronicle refers to the Umayyad dynasty of a certain Ysca Miramomelin (Hishām ibn 'Abd al-Malik or Hishām I).¹⁴ We then learn that Fines inherits lands in Iberia that include "many castles and villages" and various cities such as Almeria, Granada, and Malaga: all of which form a kingdom through which Fines eventually becomes "lord of all that the Moors had control of in Spain" (*señor de todo lo que los moros auien en España*).¹⁵

This information is purportedly derived from an earlier history about the Moorish kings of Africa and Spain written by one Sigiberto — but who is this author? At one point we are told that he "wrote this history in Arabic,"¹⁶ while elsewhere he is described as "a wise man who took the history [...] from the Arabic," implying that he is more of translator and compiler than a historian.¹⁷ A contemporaneous medieval text that summarizes the *Flores* legend attributes its authorship to a similarly named Guilberto, but specifies that his origins are Roman, suggesting a source translated from Arabic into Latin.¹⁸ Evidence of bilingualism

¹³ *Crónica*, 49.

¹⁴ The identification of the "Ysca" of the romance with the historical Hishām I is derived from the chronological setting of these events and because the name "Ysca" is used for Hishām I in many chapters and variants of the *Estoria de Espanna*. For discussion see *Crónica*, Introduction, 31; and Grieve, *Floire and Blancheflor*, Appendix A, 202.

¹⁵ *Crónica*, 50–51.

¹⁶ *Crónica*, 61.

¹⁷ *Crónica*, 57.

¹⁸ Arbesú discusses this reference in the *Gran conquista de Ultramar* as well as other historical connections to the Sigiberto figure (*Crónica*, 27–29).

is certainly reflected in the narrative, as Flores and Blancaflor are both educated to “speak in Latin, just as in Arabic” (*fablar en latyn, tango como en arauigo*).¹⁹ Later in the chronicle, we are told that Sigiberto is a “native of Cordoba” (*natural de Cordoua*),²⁰ a place of origin that evokes both Iberia’s Muslim and Roman pasts. Just as Córdoba was an Umayyad capital, first for the emirate of Córdoba (*Imārat Qurṭuba*) and then of the caliphate of Córdoba (*Khilāfat Qurṭuba*), Roman Corduba was the capital city of the southern administrative territory of Baetica and the birthplace of such famous Hispano-Romans as the philosopher Seneca and his nephew Lucan. Lucan’s epic on the Roman Civil War was itself incorporated into another Alfonsine historiography, the *Estoria General*, where the poet is dubbed “Lucano, un sabio de España que fue natural de la Cibdad de Córdova del Andaluzía.”²¹ In short, the significance of Córdoba’s rich heritage would not have been lost on the audience of the Alfonsine narrative, and its association with the authorial persona of “Guilberto” would have lent further historical legitimacy to the tale and to its purported sources.

The 1512 romance places a more marked emphasis on Rome. In this version, Blancaflor’s father is named Persio and is nephew to the Roman emperor.²²

In the province or empire of Rome, there was a nobleman, very rich and powerful, lord of many places and villages and castles within the Roman Empire, such that he virtually commanded the greatest part of Rome, and his name was *micer* Persio.²³

Here, Roman territorial holdings function as counterpart to the Andalusian kingdom of Fines in the Alfonsine text. Even the rhetorical formulation of Persio’s “villages and castles within the Roman Empire” rhetorically parallel Fines’s “many castles and villages” that make him “lord of all Moors who were in Spain.” Persio’s Rome and Fines’s al-Andalus are thus mirrors of one another: narrative inversions that correspond to the parent’s distinct cultural and geographic origins, yet also reflections whose territorial descriptions echo the young protagonists’ own linguistic ability to move between Latin and Arabic. Where the Muslim-Christian

¹⁹ *Crónica*, 57.

²⁰ *Crónica*, 122.

²¹ The *Estoria de Espanna* also lists Lucan among its authoritative sources since Book 4 of the *Pharsalia* narrates the battle of Ilerda (49 BCE) that is today Lleida in Catalonia. The incorporation of Lucan and his *Pharsalia* into historiographic texts emerges out of longstanding debate which goes back to classical antiquity over the historic versus poetic value of his poem, and more broadly the criteria for separating out poetry from history.

²² *Narrativa Popular*, 87.

²³ *Narrativa Popular*, 85.

binary produces tension and conflict within the narrative, the overlapping (though not equivalent) linguistic binary of Latin–Arabic and the territorial binary of Roman–Andalusi suggest the possibility of compatibility, similitude, and even eventual union across cultures.

Religious Conversion and Political Destiny

Before arriving at this union of protagonists and cultures, the romances separate Flores from Blancaflor through the actions and motivations of Flores' father, who does not want to see his son marry the Christian captive, especially when he sees how devoted the two enamoured youths have become of one another.²⁴ But after a series of adventures across the Mediterranean, the two lovers are eventually re-united, their love for one another rekindled. Yet before they can seal their love through marriage, the narrative requires one further step from its male protagonist: Flores must convert to Christianity. The narratological necessity of Flores' conversion—which does not reflect the historical reality of the thirteenth century—betrays a certain limitation in how far the romance is willing to take the earlier established compatibility of their protagonists through linguistic education and joint upbringing. Yet marriage is still only one element in a broader treatment of conversion within the story. In narrativizing conversion at both the personal and the political level, the romance positions religion not as distinct from, or even superior to, other processes of cultural accommodation and union. By the time we arrive at the 1512 romance and the Lead Books, however, religious conversion is not only depicted as necessary, it comes to require the support of other constituent factors—political, cultural, and even narratological—to successfully sustain itself.

Though Flores always converts to Christianity, the narrative emphasis placed on this moment, and even Flores' motivations for converting, differ across the various versions. In the Alfonsine chronicle, Flores seems almost destined for Christianity since infancy, as the narrative emphasizes how he was nursed by Blancaflor's mother and that "the essence of the milk of the Christian woman moved him to this."²⁵ The

²⁴ Both Wacks, "Crónica," reading the Alfonsine chronicle; and Shutters, "Christian Love," reading the Old French poem; note that such interreligious marriage would not have been especially uncommon or socially taboo. But where Shutters then emphasizes the role of gender and masculinity over faith, Wacks reads the protagonists' marriage, and the conversion it entails, as "a historical fantasy in which a spiritual (not military) reconquest of al-Andalus is brokered by an interreligious love story" (276). For the various methods and specific motivations by which Flores' parents separate the two lovers, see Grieve, *Floire and Blancheflor*, "The Selling of Blancheflor," 57–65.

²⁵ *Crónica*, 116–17.

providential quality of Flores' conversion is further underscored by the rather serendipitous manner by which Flores comes to encounter the place where he converts and the people who bring it about: while returning to Andalusia, a storm at sea drives Flores and his men to an especially fertile island that is home to an Augustinian monastery.²⁶ Hearing the sermons of the prior, Flores is motivated to convert and nearly all of his shipmates follow suit. The lovers' sojourn at the island monastery (which culminates in a vision of St. Augustine) also has a profound effect on Flores's spiritual state, as well as that of Blancaflor; and it is even implied that she had not truly been Christian until this point; ostensibly, she was not allowed to be baptized or to worship in Fines's Moorish court. And though neither of these motivations directly connect to their marrying as Christians, the chronicle includes something of a flashback in which the reader is privy to the thoughts of Blancaflor's mother, who prays that Flores "will become a Christian, and that he marry her daughter."²⁷

The scope of Flores' conversion extends further yet when the Augustinian prior writes to Rome with a testimony of Flores' new faith, which prompts the pope, Paul I (r. 757–767), to send a delegation led by a certain Cardinal Guarín, whom the pope commands to "establish a council in Spain, and crown King Flores and Queen Blancaflor as rulers of these kingdoms, so that through them the lands can be converted to the faith of Jesus Christ."²⁸ The meeting between Flores and the papal legate thus initiates the conversion of various portions of Muslim al-Andalus. Echoing the earlier specificity with which Fines's political territories are enumerated, the reader eventually learns that Flores and Blancaflor "appoint two archbishops, one in Seville and the other in Braganza, and beyond that in the rest of the territory, eight bishops, and they consecrated the Church of Córdoba."²⁹ And yet, Flores' Christianizing of Muslim populations operates not only through

26 Though the island holds particular narrative importance within the Alfonsine version, it also makes an appearance in the 1512 romance, where it becomes instead a "savage island" (*isla salvaje*) devoid of human presence and populated only by wild beasts: *Narrativa Popular*, 123. However, neither version of the romance explicitly identifies the locale. A tempting possibility is Sicily, praised by both Muslim and Christian writers, whose monarch Frederick II (r. 1198–1250), a kinsman of Alfonso X through his mother, was at once an admirer of Arabic learning yet also forcibly relocated Sicily's own "Moriscos" to the Italian mainland, thus mirroring certain Muslim–Christian dynamics we see at play in both Iberian history and our two romances. However, the Alfonsine version's sole piece of identifying information places the island "in the bay of the *mar oceano*" (i.e. the Atlantic Ocean): *Crónica*, 115. Thus, at least in the Alfonsine version, the island seems to more rightly evoke the classical image of the Fortunate Isles, which were at times equated with the Canary Islands or Madeira.

27 *Crónica*, 123.

28 *Crónica*, 126.

29 *Crónica*, 126.

spiritual conversion but also through military conquest. After delving into the conflict between the Umayyad and Abbasid dynasties in North Africa, the narrative concludes with Flores sending an expeditionary force there.

And King Flores turned his attention to Andalucia, but in spite of all of this concentration he did not rest. But after only a few days, he put together a very large fleet, and he entered the ships and passed to Africa through the Strait of Cadiz. And shortly after his arrival he conquered the village of Zale and the Castle of Tangers [...] And King Flores entered the land and conquered a great part of it less than two years. And he did this with the help of other Christians of Morocco, who are still there today and are called *frafanes*.³⁰

Flores' conquest of Morocco and North Africa, with the help of the native Moroccan-Christian *frafanes*, thus becomes something of a reverse, or inverse, of the 711 Muslim invasion of Iberia. Tariq's historic crossing of the Strait of Gibraltar now plays out in the other direction, from north to south, and is undertaken by a converted Christian Moor—we might even say *Morisco*. By aligning internal spiritual conversion with territorial conquest, the romance becomes the wish-fulfillment of both territorial reconquest and Christian crusade. However, Flores' conversion is not a sign that he has been conquered and made subservient to Christians; it is the first step in his own transformation into a conquering Christian warlord.³¹ Moreover, this narrative of African conquest is wholly unique to the Aflonsine chronicle's version of the romance, which also looks ahead to a political future in which Flores' and Blancaflor's daughter Berta marries "King Pepin of France and Germany,"³² father of Charlemagne.³³

The printed version of 1512 goes in very different directions when narrativizing both Flores' conversion and the ensuing political state of his kingdom. In contrast to the Alfonsine text, in which his conversion is accidental or providential, this romance makes Flores' conversion a requirement stipulated by Blancaflor:

30 *Crónica*, 134. As Arbesú discusses, "farfanes" or "frafanes" is a historical term that refers to Christians who went to Morocco in the eighth century and did not return until 1390: 134n44.

31 We can also situate Flores' conquests in North Africa in relation to Alfonso X's own "Projected Crusade to Morocco": O'Callaghan, *Reconquest and Crusade*, 117–23.

32 *Crónica*, 135.

33 As Grieve points out, in a narrative otherwise bereft of irony, there is something perhaps playfully ironic in a conclusion where "Charlemagne, the confounder of Saracens, should himself be descended from the Moorish Kings of Spain": *Floire and Blancheflor*, 140. This genealogy is, of course, entirely fanciful; though Charlemagne's mother was named Berta (or Bertrade), she was from Laon.

As Blancaflor understood Flores' intentions, she told him that she would be very happy if he were to become a Christian, since her being a Christian but him a Moor did not seem to her in the service of God, nor a licit deed. And Flores was happy to do what Blancaflor told him and become a Christian and marry Blancaflor.³⁴

The 1512 romance situates Flores' conversion as a mandate, rather than situating it within a spiritual journey. Religion, we might say, becomes a means for achieving the further objective of unity. Moreover, the fruit of Flores and Blancaflor's marriage is also altered. Replacing the daughter Berta is a son named Godorión: an ahistorical figure about whose future progeny nothing is said.

But perhaps the greatest narrative divergence arises in Flores' actions once he becomes king. Instead of conquering territory in North Africa, Flores' political and religious influence is felt only at home in the Iberian Peninsula. Conversion is no longer confined to the Moorish subjects of Flores' own kingdom; instead, all of Spain's Moors follow Flores' religious example, as "within the span of six months the greatest part of Spain was converted to the faith of Christ."³⁵ Personal conversion becomes mass conversion, and Flores becomes the first king of a united, and unified Christian, Spain. If the Flores of the medieval chronicle is a Christian inversion of the Islamic conqueror Tariq, the 1512 Flores is a Morisco amalgam of Ferdinand and Isabella—with the stark difference that he has united the Iberian Peninsula, not by force of violent military conquest but because the Muslim population looks to him as a political and spiritual model.

In this version, as I discussed above, the description of Fines's kingdom in al-Andalus is replaced by that of Persio's lands in the Roman empire. This initial substitution presages the concluding event of the 1512 romance, which returns to imperial Rome when Flores—through the uncle of his father-in-law—inherits the throne of Rome's empire. If my title gave away this conclusion, so does the full title of the work itself, which entices the reader to learn how Flores and Blancaflor "converted all of Spain to the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ; and how afterward they became emperors of Rome, as you shall see further on."³⁶ Even before it begins, the printed narrative advertises the symbolic destination of this romance as Rome and its empire.

There are many ways to read the romance's Roman imaginary. Grieve, for instance, assumes that the throne Flores inhabits is that of the Holy Roman

³⁴ *Narrativa Popular*, 120. It also stated that Flores wears the sign of the cross on his armour: an iconographic matching the historical transition from reconquest to Iberian crusade: O'Callaghan, *Reconquest and Crusade*, 180–85.

³⁵ *Narrativa Popular*, 125.

³⁶ *Narrativa Popular*, 85.

Empire.³⁷ Another possibility would be the eastern Roman (or “Byzantine”) empire—tempting not only because the people of the eastern empire continued to call themselves Romans and the empire Rome (rulers as late as John Paleologus in the fifteenth century took the title of “king and emperor of the Romans”)—but also because the story’s Moorish connections remind us that Byzantium was consistently referred to as “Rūm” in Arabic. Though I do not discount the possibility that the 1512 romance might seek to evoke the cultural and political histories of either or both post-classical empires, the immediate point of reference, however anachronistic, is decidedly the Rome of the Caesars. Frequently attuned to geographic detail, the text is very clear that Flores travels not to Constantinople or any Germanic principality (Vienna was the capital of the Holy Roman Empire in 1512) but to Rome itself.³⁸ Flores’ primary supporter in the Roman Senate is likewise a historical figure, Prospero Colonna, whose family styled itself as descending from ancient Roman stock, granting further classical resonances to the concluding episode.³⁹

So how does a Moorish prince become a Roman Caesar? He does so by converting to Christianity, marrying into a family of Roman patricians, and gaining the support and vote of the Roman Senate. But perhaps the more interesting question is not *how* but *why*; why make the Moorish-born Flores a Roman Caesar?

Emperor Flores and His Legacy: Roman Hispania Answers the Morisco Question

The conclusion of the romance published in 1512 ends the way it does in order to solve the social problem of Spain’s Moriscos—a problem that would have been acutely felt in a city like Seville, where the romance was reprinted numerous times in the 1520s. Contemporaneous with these reprintings was Antonio de Guevara’s *Dial of Princes* (*Relox de príncipes*, 1529), which presents its content as the rediscovered personal correspondence and autobiography of the Roman emperor and philosopher Marcus Aurelius (r. 161–180).⁴⁰ And just as the *Dial* is a textual hybrid of history and fiction, so its protagonist Marcus Aurelius is an ethno-national hybrid. Guevara reminds his readers that Aurelius’s ancestry

³⁷ Grieve, *Floire and Blancheflor*, 90–91.

³⁸ *Narrativa Popular*, 126.

³⁹ While the Italian *Cantare* mentions that Flores “was elected emperor” (*fu eletto imperadore*), the extended foray into the politics and procedures of the Roman Senate, complete with a vote, is unique to the 1512 Spanish romance.

⁴⁰ For Guevara’s career-long engagement with “pseudo-historical fiction,” see Chiong Rivero, *The Rise*.

derives from Roman patrician stock but that his genealogical roots are provincial and Hispano-Roman: “in these times many from Spain went to Rome, and many from Rome resided in Spain. As such, this Emperor had a great-grandfather who was Roman and a great-grandmother who was Spanish” (*en cuyos tiempos muchos de España se fueron a Roma y muchos de Roma se quedaron en España. Y, así, este Emperador tuvo el visabuelo romano y la visabuela española*).⁴¹ Aurelius’ mixed background thus serves as a biographical and genealogical metonym for Iberia’s storied history as a land where populations migrate and merge.

While Guevara’s pseudo-historical letters, often satirical, revel in their literary gamesmanship, the forged Lead Books of Granada were meant to be taken as authentic artifacts and documentary evidence that St. James had converted a population of pre-Islamic Iberian Arabs to Christianity. However, Seth Kimmel has shown how contemporary debates over their authenticity frequently invoked a vocabulary of fiction/*ficción*.⁴² For Kimmel, this fungible discourse is mirrored in the Lead Books’ articulation of a “flexible Christianity,”⁴³ a theological message not only intended to appeal to the Moriscos of Granada, but also to provide a lesson in tolerance to the rest of Spain regarding its treatment of Moriscos. Like the *Flores* romance of 1512, the Lead Books imagine Moorish-Roman hybridity through representation of an anachronistic Arabic population living harmoniously alongside Hispano-Romans within the social fabric of first-century provincial Hispania. One of the lengthiest instalments of the Lead Books, the “Book of the Deeds of the Apostle James and of his Miracles,”⁴⁴ narrates how James and his fellow missionaries travel to Hispania and, upon their arrival, encounter a community of “gentile Romans” who welcome them with “no intention to do them harm.”⁴⁵ From there, James and his companions travel to various Hispano-Roman cities, seeing the many temples of Tolemón, a Roman school in Córdoba, and the “strong fortification, marvellous to behold” of Roma la Pequeña.⁴⁶

The landscape of Roman Hispania and the classical structures that St. James and his companions encounter during their missionary travels evoke the broader

⁴¹ Guevara, *Relox*, 86.

⁴² Kimmel, “Writing Religion,” 120–31.

⁴³ Kimmel, “Writing Religion,” 188.

⁴⁴ In Spanish the work is titled “Libro de las acciones de Jacobo Apóstol y de sus milagros” and in Arabic “Kitāb Maḥāsīn Ya‘qūb al-Ḥawārī.”

⁴⁵ *Los Libros*, 223. Hagerty’s edition is based largely on the 1631 translation by Adán Centurión, marqués de Estepa. Access to the remaining artifacts remains difficult to this day.

⁴⁶ *Los Libros*, 228, 235, 245.

landscape of humanist antiquarianism against which, as historian Katie Harris argues, we should situate the Lead Books' very fabrication. With their desire to reinvent Granada's Roman and early Christian pasts, the Lead Books mirror the ways that Granada's municipal institutions, not unlike those of other Spanish cities, aggressively sought to reclaim the legitimacy of Hispano-Roman antiquity. Harris demonstrates this when she compares the Lead Books to contemporary antiquarian projects of sixteenth- and early-seventeenth-century Granada.

On one occasion, the city council forcibly confiscated the remains of some Roman statuary discovered under a private residence in the Albaicín and erected fragments—an inscription and a mutilated head of Furia Sabina Tranquilina wife of Emperor Marcus Antonius Gordianus (A.D. 225–44)—outside the council's chambers in Madraza.⁴⁷

This incident illustrates how the spatial confluence of material remains and modern needs could fuse the Muslim and the Hispano-Roman in ways that parallel the imaginative fiction of the 1512 romance and the Lead Books' historical and theological forgery of Moorish–Roman hybridity. Indeed, it demonstrates why the Lead Books were planted among the rubble and ruins of a dilapidated minaret known as the Turpiana Tower: the Roman inscriptions and bust of Empress Furia Sabina Tranquilina had emerged, of all places, within the neighbourhood most associated with Granada's Moorish past, the Albaicín. They were then to be moved to another locale of Moorish patrimony, the Madraza, that is, the madrasa established by the Naşrid Sultan Yūsuf I (r. 1333 and 1354). It is therefore no surprise that humanist archaeology and antiquarianism came to play a role in the debates surrounding the Lead Books, as well as in their fabrication. In his ardent defence of the books' authenticity, the jurist Gregorio López Madera cites various Roman inscriptions on metal tablets as material precedents and parallels.

However, the hybridity of Hispano-Roman and Islamic cultures has its own genealogy within the *Flores* legend. In her discussion of the oldest surviving version, that of twelfth-century Francia, Sharon Kinoshita analyzes its poetic descriptions of culturally hybrid material goods to propose that such objects underscore the extent to which Mediterranean identities emerged, not from single origin points, but rather within circulatory networks of connectivity, contact, and exchange.⁴⁸ Similarly, in Giovanni Boccaccio's *Filocolo*, composed in Florence around 1335, the circulation of material objects is a vector for imagining cultural bonds between

⁴⁷ Harris, *From Muslim to Christian Granada*, 52. Here Harris draws especially on the 1608 *Antiquity and Excellences of Granada* (*Antigüedad y excelencias de Granada*) of Francisco Bermúdez de la Pedraza.

⁴⁸ Kinoshita, "Negotiating," 41–43.

Romans and Moors. As the first instalment of the *Flores* legend to confer Roman ancestry on Blancaflor (here Biancifiore), it anticipates and possibly influenced the 1512 Spanish romance.⁴⁹ To be sure, Boccaccio's Roman framework is far more historically sophisticated: Biancifiore descends from the family of Julius Caesar on her mother's side and that of Scipio Africanus on her father's.⁵⁰ Beyond attesting to her noble pedigree, descent from Scipio Africanus comes to play a role in the narrative when Biancifiore gives Flores (here Florio) a magic ring that will change colour if she is in danger. Boccaccio explains that, during the Second Punic War (fought between Hannibal's Carthaginians and the Roman Republic), a vanquished Carthaginian soldier named Alchimedes had presented this ring to the victor Scipio, and that it had previously belonged to Hannibal's own brother Hasdrubal.⁵¹ Alchimedes specifies that he had received the ring from Hasdrubal when the two parted ways in Spain, a statement in keeping with the fact that many battles of the Second Punic War were fought in the Iberian Peninsula.⁵²

Within the narrative world of the *Filocolo*, this flashback creates a transhistorical mirroring wherein the contemporaneous conflict between Christians and Muslims becomes a repetition of earlier Iberian battles, in which Scipio's Romans fought against their own North African adversaries.⁵³ But if casting the imperial rivalry between Rome and Carthage as a precursor to the military conflict between Christians and Muslims would seem to reify a European *versus* North African binary, or to construct a Western *versus* Oriental Other, this seeming divide is again bridged by the material exchange of the magic ring, first from the Carthaginian general and Alchimedes to the Roman Scipio and then, centuries later, from the Roman Biancifiore to Moorish Florio.⁵⁴ Indeed, within Boccaccio's ethno-historical paradigm, in which Moors inherit the legacy of Carthage, Florio's eventual acquisition of the ring first owned by Hasdrubal grants the object a homecoming, for it

49 As mentioned, Grieve proposes an "Italo-Spanish" grouping and likewise demonstrates how elements previously thought original to the *Filocolo* are present in the Alfonsine chronicle (Grieve, *Floire and Blancaflor*, 30, 33).

50 Boccaccio, *Il Filocolo*, 8.

51 Boccaccio, *Il Filocolo*, 68.

52 Indeed, the war begins when Hannibal crosses the agreed-upon boundary of the Ebro river and then lays siege to the Roman-allied city of Saguntum. Rome's eventual victory likewise ensures that the Peninsula falls squarely within its imperial territory.

53 Of course, to characterize the Andalusi as North African and thus "foreign" to Iberia is to play into Castilian propaganda. Similarly, the Carthaginians' own Iberian settlements made them more "native" to the region, compared to the Romans; Hannibal's own wife Himilce was the daughter of a Celtiberian chieftain and born in Castulo (present-day Jaén in Andalusia).

54 The possibility that Alchimedes and Hasdrubal are themselves lovers is intimated not only by the ring's tendency to pass between lovers (before Florio and Biancifiore, the parents

is exchanged within the very geographic space wherein it was first separated from its original owner, Spain.

The *Filocolo's* treatment of Iberia, as both spatial metonym and microcosm for the broader cultural contact zone of the Mediterranean, is all the more heightened in yet another scene of battle, and one more integral to the narrative sequence of events. With all the classicizing literary ambitions of the humanist, Boccaccio turns the initial Moorish raid on the travelling party—where Biancifiore's father is killed and her mother captured—into an epic battle in which two armies clash and encounter heavy losses.⁵⁵ At the battle's end, the victorious Muslims scavenge the field for spoils (another mode of material exchange) but soon realize that they cannot differentiate the corpses of their enemies from those of "their fathers and brothers and comrades [...] because of the mixture of dust and blood on their faces."⁵⁶ Battle has erased ethnic differences through elements both earthly and corporeal, and the passing of time only intensifies this erosion; in a vivid addendum, Boccaccio describes another scavenging, this time of beasts who descend from the forests and skies to pick apart the remains. What is left of the two sides is now even more indistinguishable, and made further so by the forces of wind, sun, and rain that paint the Spanish soil in a pallet of "Roman ashes [mixed] with those of unknown Arabs."⁵⁷ The *Filocolo* returns to this scene toward its conclusion, when Biancifiore wishes to provide the soldiers' remains, including those of her father, with a proper burial. She frets, however, at her inability to distinguish the bones of horses from those of humans, yet nowhere voices a similar worry about separating out Roman from Muslim remains.⁵⁸ A divine miracle eventually transforms the human bones from white to vermilion, allowing them to be identified and then sent to Rome as now miraculous relics for sacred burial.⁵⁹

of the latter), but also by the text itself, when Alchimedes' states that "[Hasdrubal] loved me more than himself": Boccaccio, *Il Filocolo*, 68.

55 Within this grand scale there is nonetheless a mismatch between the Romans and Moors, as Biancifiore's father commands only "three little bands" while the Moorish troops constitute an "infinite multitude": Boccaccio, *Il Filocolo*, 461.

56 Boccaccio, *Il Filocolo*, 32.

57 Boccaccio, *Il Filocolo*, 40. In this passage, Boccaccio evinces a clear debt to the aforementioned Hispano-Roman poet Lucan and imitates his description of the field of bloodshed produced by the poem's titular battle at Pharsalus (*Pharsalia* 7:825–46). That Lucan had narrated a civil war fought between two Roman factions further underscores the sense of similarity and indistinguishability between the Moors and Romans of the *Filocolo*.

58 Boccaccio, *Il Filocolo*, 461–62.

59 As Rome becomes the destination of this burial, it is possible that only Roman bones changed colour, though nonetheless significant that this distinction is not explicit.

Boccaccio's depiction of holy relics as objects of trans-Mediterranean material circulation brings us back to the Spanish *Flores* romance of 1512, as well as to the Lead Books of Granada. Though the former features only a single description of a material object, it is one that connects Rome to the cult of St. James at Compostela. In preparation for his pilgrimage, *micer* Persio orders the three finest silversmiths of Rome to fashion a veiled statue that will serve as an offering to "honour and revere the lord Santiago and his image."⁶⁰ However, unlike the circulating objects of Boccaccio's *Filocolo*, Persio's gilded statue never reaches its intended destination. Yet this interrupted material exchange generates its own message and meaning when the itinerary from Rome to Spain is eventually completed in reverse, as Flores journeys to Rome to be named Caesar. Whereas Boccaccio's magic ring and bone relics were circulating symbols of cultural hybridity and material exchange, the interplay between the (failed) trip of Persio's statue and Flores's own (successful) travels indicates that the political journey of an individual can accomplish what the transport of a religious object could not. Flores' ability to unite Spain's Christians and Muslims presages his eventual forging of an imperial bond between Rome and Spain, and specifically to Spain's Moors/Moriscons. Thus, while material circulation provides a narrative precedent, the symbolic solution to socio-political tensions is only realized once the romance's protagonist completes his adventure-journey.

The juxtaposition of material failure when compared to the narrative success of Flores in the 1512 romance is also characteristic of the Lead Books, as well their reception history. Just as Persio's pilgrimage was supposed to have a material complement in the gilded statue, so the Lead Books narrativize their own physical trajectory in ways that parallel St. James's wanderings in Roman Hispania. The inspiration for this journey, according to their account, begins with the Virgin Mary showing James and his disciples "precious inscribed tablets" which she instructs them to take "to the earth's extreme, which is called Spain."⁶¹ As objects, the Lead Books would later make their own journey from Spain to Rome, so that their authenticity could be determined by the Vatican, which ultimately declared the tablets to be forgeries. For some contemporary observers, however, the Lead Books offered socio-political lessons that could be separated from their counterfeit material composition and even their spurious theological teachings. The Roman humanist and philologist Bernardo de Aldrete doubted the authenticity of the Lead Books, yet their "discovery" and the debates that ensued prompted him to compare Spain's harsh treatment of its Morisco population to Roman colonial projects. As Kathryn Woolard has pointed out, Aldrete recognized a glaring

⁶⁰ *Narrativa Popular*, 93.

⁶¹ *Los Libros*, 221–22.

discrepancy between the Moor's "aversion [toward Spaniards] which is almost natural" compared to that fondness which, in Aldrete's eyes, Roman colonies felt toward the empire.⁶² Though Aldrete acknowledges that the Romans spread their culture and the Latin language through war, he likewise lauds them for fostering unity through "friendship, kinship, and marriages."⁶³

Aldrete accordingly treated the Lead Books, not as forgeries to be dismissed, but as a fiction to be learned from; in a rather Jamesonian fashion, his reading is aimed at uncovering symbolic solutions for the unresolved tensions and contradictions of his time. His conclusions suggest that the Lead Books might have accomplished more had their creators not aspired to have them be received as authentic religious artifacts, but instead represented them as aspirational literary fictions that imagined symbolic socio-political resolutions to real-world problems. In their striving for historical authenticity, indeed, the Lead Books remind us of how the Alfonsine *Flores* was woven into an "authentic" historical chronology. Such painstaking historical forgeries throw the artless anachronism of the 1512 romance into even greater relief, while its popularity and multiple reprintings demonstrate the greater success of its tactics. By so blatantly violating the rules of historical discourse, this text announced itself as an imaginative literary fiction that built upon earlier efforts to re-invent and reimagine a Roman history for Spain and its hybrid population, in order to address the challenges of the present.

⁶² Woolard, "Seventeenth-Century Debate," 72.

⁶³ Woolard, "Seventeenth-Century Debate," 71.

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Abstract This article reads the two Spanish versions of the *Flores* romance as ideologically embedded in the conflict and contact between Christians and Muslims in medieval Iberia, as well as after the “Reconquista” of 1492 and the subsequent renegotiation of Spanish–Morisco relations. It argues that the printed version of the romance, published in 1512 and frequently reprinted, imagines a fictional resolution to the problem of the Moriscos’ socio-political status by making its Morisco protagonist an emperor of Rome. It contrasts this successful fiction with a failed contemporary forgery that had a similar goal: the Lead Books of Granada.

Keywords: *Flores y Blancaflor*, Reconquista, Moriscos, Moors, Muslim–Christian relations, materiality, Lead Books of Sacromonte, Granada, Roman Hispania, Antonio de Guevara, Boccaccio, *Filocolo*

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